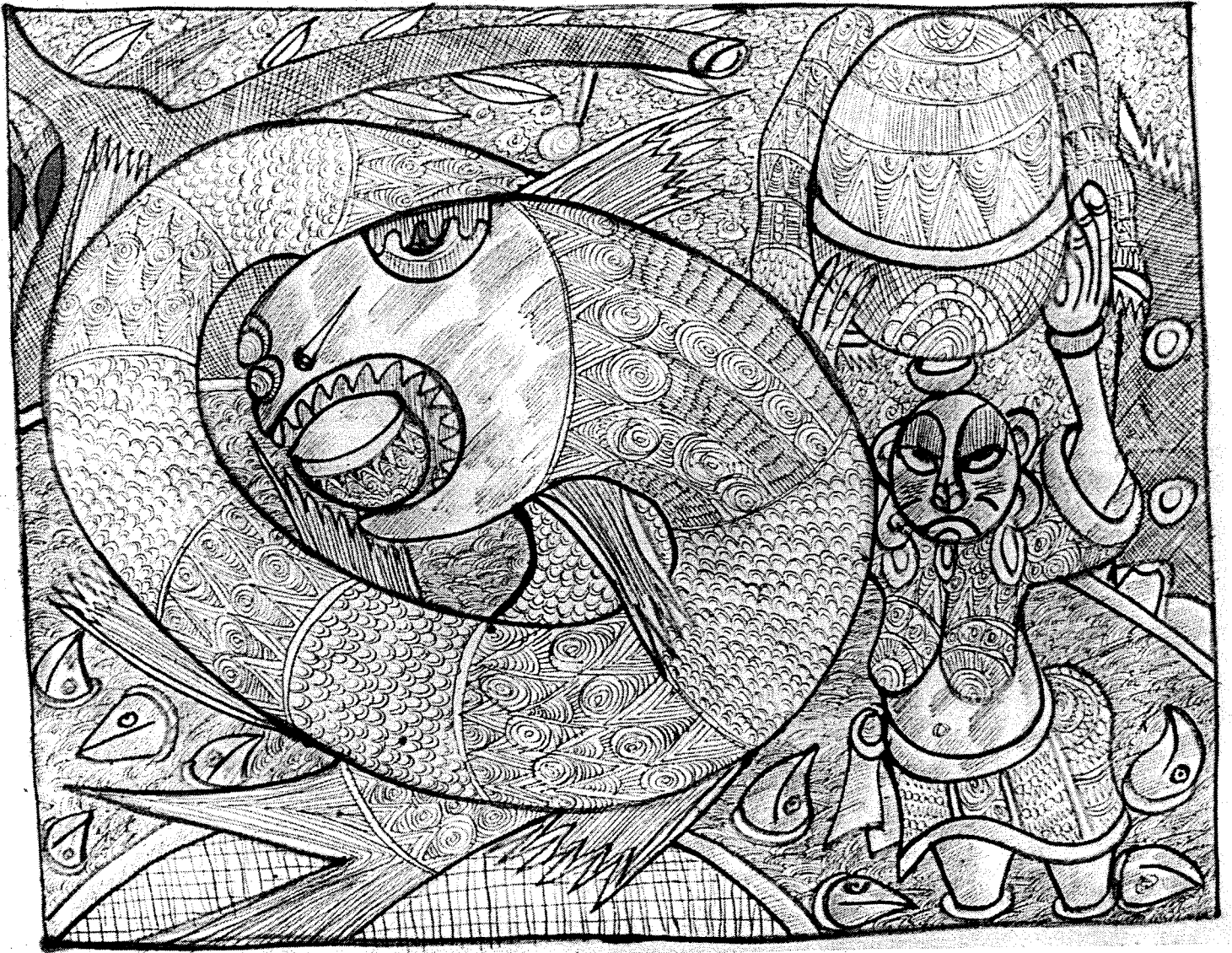


MIDNIGHT NOTES



#9 — Wages — Mexico — Libya — India — \$4

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Midnight Notes Collective: George Caffentzis, Silvia Federici, Peter Linebaugh, Johnny Machete, Monty Neill. **Associates:** Steven Colatrella, John Roosa.

Covers: Drawings by Ola, Nigerian artist

Alhaji P.A. "Ola" Oladapo was born forty-three years ago in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. "Ile-Ife" in Yoruba literally means "the land of love" and is said to be "the navel of the world." Ola has worked as an artist since his youth. He contributed to the revival of Yoruba art, which had its center in Oshogbo. He now lives in Ibadan, where he paints scenes from Nigerian daily life as well as tales from Yoruba mythology.

The photos of Ola's work are by Matt Jones.

The photos by Sharon Haggins Dunn were shot in Nicaragua in 1985. She was on an "Educators' Tour," visiting schools and day care centers in urban and rural areas. Some of the children are El Salvadoran refugees. In one instance, the teacher had been kidnapped by contras several days before Sharon arrived and was presumed dead. The purposes of the tour included not only finding out what was happening, but establishing person-to-person ties and developing a means to send needed supplies to Nicaragua.

The photographs of India were taken in Garwhal Himalayas in 1986 by John Roosa.

The photographs of Tepito were taken by Harry Cleaver.

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Introduction to *Midnight Notes* #9

And in winter, under my greatcoat, I wrapped myself in swathes of newspaper, and did not shed them until the earth awoke, for good, in April. The Times Literary Supplement was admirably adopted to this purpose, of a never failing toughness and impermeability. Even farts made no impression on it. I can't help it, gas escapes from my fundament on the least pretext, it's hard not to mention it now and then, however my distaste. One day I counted them. 315 farts in 19 hours, or an average of over 16 farts an hour. After all it's not excessive. 4 farts every 15 minutes. It's nothing. Not even one fart every 4 minutes. It's unbelievable. Damn it, I hardly fart at all, I should never have mentioned it. Extraordinary how mathematics help you to know yourself.

—Sam Beckett, *Molloy*

Midnight Notes last occurred in the fall of 1985. Since then it has sent its emissaries to all the major continents of the planet. . . some even to smell the tear gas and smoke in Tahiti. We returned to Boston with our findings only to be met by the October 19, 1987 Crash of the New York Stock Exchange and its cousins from Singapore to Rome. The Crash made the economic and monetary jeremiahs busy with explanations and oracles. We, on the other side, have merely noted that the non-opening, non-shattering windows on the Wall Street towers were strategically planned to assure a minimum of damage to the pavements below and the psyches around.

Our findings seem to have little direct relevance to the Crash. At first they appear to be a re-cycling of the Apocalyptic themes of the late 1970s when capital was declaring "the Age of Limits," of too little energy and too many mouths to feed. Our articles in this issue trace the progress of starvation, war and plague across the planet's and body's Tropic of Cancer. Food politics in India, the US bombing of Tripoli, earthquakes in Mexico; AIDS: all seem to call for the 1498 Durer plates on the Book of Revelations once more.

Capital's explanations of these late 1980s catastrophes, however, has shifted from the limitation-of-energy-ecological-demographic-panic-nuclear-winter-holocaust (sic!) scenario of the past. The media are busy with Debt Crisis, World Depression, Eurosclerotic Structural Barriers to Growth, Massive Mid-West Banking Defaults, Sisyphean Third World Debt Bondage, Tendentially Declining US Real Wages, Chronic European Unemployment, Free Falling Dollars, Cyclopean Trade and Budget Deficits. In the thinking of capitalist analysts, The Apocalypse of Money has displaced the Total Annihilation promised a decade ago by the much feared collision of Technology with Nature. Ironically, as the avant-garde of the Marxist and anti-Marxist intelligentsia

hotly debate post-marxism and post-modernity, the themes of the most vulgar of Marxisms drifted to the top of the capitalist agenda.

Our task, therefore, is much easier. Whereas in earlier issues of *Midnight Notes* we traced the lineaments of the class war in the emptying caverns of oil and the circuitry of the Cruise Missile's navigation computer, in this round we need merely lift, with practiced hand, the Veil of Money to expose the most basic of our struggles. The point of this introduction is to take you for a midnight ride around this cancerous planet below the depleting ozone layers of post-ist discourse. Luckily our intercelestial friends have lent us a useful vehicle, so our introductory voyage will be short and swift.

Let us begin our tour above the towers of Wall Street, at the vortex of capital's electromagnetic field of money. Tapping the field reveals that the messages are definitely desperate and entropic. It is now almost five years since the beginning of one of the longest cycles of expanded reproduction in US capital's history. However, this is the first "boom" in the post-WWII era when average weekly real (AWR) wages did not rise. At the trough of the 1979-1983 recessions the AWR wage was \$168.08; in

Not surprisingly this wage implosion correlates strictly with a collapse in strike activity in the post-1973 period. If we distinguish two major post-WWII eras (1947-73 when AWR wages rose 2.3% a year on average and 1974-87 when AWR wages fell 1% on average) and calculate the average percentage of estimated work-time in "days idle" because of "work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers" per year in each period, we get a result that is not surprising: .17% for the 1947-73 period and .08% for the 1974-87 period. Roughly speaking this constitutes a 53% fall in this measure of "workers' militancy."

These facts explain much, from the rise of murder (becoming the fourth-ranked cause of death in the US, after heart attacks, cancer and accidents), to the decline of the individual savings rate from 5.4% to 3.8% of GNP, to the unprecedented increase in personal consumer debt in the 1974-87 period. Do they explain the Crash? Apparently not. After all, lower wages and docile workers are the essence of "healthy profits." They are not "problems" but "gifts" from the US working class to their masters, are they not?

But the messages Wall Street emanates are not sent to the past, they are beams of futurity. They detect storms

**1987 average weekly real wages are at the level of 1961.
If this tendential fall continues, the next millenium will
dawn with US average weekly real wages at a 1930s level.**

September 1987 the AWR wage was \$167.70 (both in 1977 constant dollars). Indeed, since 1973 US AWR wages have fallen about 15%; this is a one per cent drop per year on average over two seven-year business cycles. The result: 1987 AWR wages are at the level of 1961. If this tendential fall continues, the next millenium will dawn with US AWR wages at a 1930s level.¹

ahead, intimating the end of the recent "heyday of wage mildness." Why? The official unemployment rate fell below 6% in June 1987 (its lowest level since 1979), "output per hour" increased by 2.5% while real wages fell by nearly 6%, and profits soared. The two-tier wage system that has intensified and institutionalized the dramatic increase in wage dispersion is increasingly being challenged in union

contract negotiations; there is a widespread sense (and reality) of a "coming labor shortage": these are elements of a potential "wage explosion" that would undermine the premises of profitability in this period. Even to prevent the further decline of wages will block profitability.

Many of these intimations were apparently verified by the UAW contract that was signed immediately prior to the Crash. The contract put a limit on the cut-and-run tactics of auto companies in their globalization of production by "guaranteeing" that the companies will "maintain current job levels at all units in all locations and will prevent layoffs for virtually any reason except carefully-defined volume reductions linked to market conditions." The only response to this expression of workers' power in the case of the auto industry in particular (and capital in general) is the act of self-immolation of capital whose first stage was the Crash. Only an economic Apocalypse can check the wage catastrophe capital sees looming in the US. Thus in the months following the contract signing, GM shut down its Framingham, Mass. plant and Chrysler announced its first plant shutdown and layoffs since the recession of the early 1980s. We now turn our UFO eastward across the Atlantic. In an instant the cradle of capitalism emerges from the sea. As Capital rises to greet us we see it is no longer a youth; note the signs of sclerosis in its veins and joints, of an accumulated historicity in the frame, even a hysterisis in the bones.²

Its story is quite different from the American tale of the post-1973 period. In France, Italy, West Germany and the UK, real wages, instead of tendentially declining, have risen 22.2% in the 1973-85 period. By the beginning of the next millenium, at this roughly 2% per year average, the real wage will be approximately 50% above its first "oil shock" level. On the plane of nominal wages, especially with the post-1985 "free fall" of the dollar, the Europeans now are at a comparable level to the US. In 1985, the US nominal hourly wage was \$8.57, while the 1985 nominal hourly wages (at 1987 exchange rates) in France were \$6.42, in the UK \$7.41, in Belgium \$7.80, in West Germany \$9.10, in Denmark \$12.00 and in Switzerland \$12.24.

On the other side there has been a decisive drop in all the indices of employment. Meet Old Capital's minion, the European working class. Its employment characteristics make it a class of capital's "rich Blacks." Since the late 1970s, European employment patterns (though not wage trends) are similar to that of US

Blacks. European unemployment in the 1984-87 period was steady at about 20-25%, while male labor participation rates fell by about 15% between 1970-84 to 81% of total adult male population. In 1985, the US Black unemployment rate was 15%, Black youth unemployment was 32% and the male participation rate 71%. But—for US Blacks these statistics measured sources of a wage differential that has Black-to-White Median Family Income at .56 (in 1984). The European working class, however, has managed to turn the European-US wage ratio increasingly in its favor.

How has this economic "magic"—rising wages in a stagnant European economy in comparison to falling wages in a booming US—been realized? European wages are predicated in part on a deal between high-waged Euro-workers and Old Euro-Capital. The latter remembers the 1968 wage explosions in the factories of France and Italy which put an end to the wage restraint still exercised by lingering WWII terrors. The Euro-worker says to Euro-Capital, "If you try to deny or crush us, you will only bring into your plants those who are much worse than us... the terrorists!" Who are these terrorists but the young, the black, the southerners, the junkies, indeed, anyone who is outside of the "guaranteed circle." In its "cleansing fury," capital has thrown out of the labor market a large number who cannot even be a reserve army for the "guaranteed, high wage" jobs.

Thus Europe has filled with a world of labor market *desaparecidos* who perform an important function in the cynical conjurations of the European working class. As long as the young-black-IRA-Algerian-etc. *desperados* keep up the threat of calamity, the older guaranteed can ally in their repression while keeping alive, through this very repressive deal, the systemic memory of their own once threatening wage explosion. Without this memory, their real wage would be in jeopardy.

This tenuous arrangement, imitating the historic Black-White class relations in the US and producing for some high wages in a rigid labor market, now faces a cold stratospheric wind blowing across the Atlantic from the crashing towers of Wall St. Dr. America has diagnosed Euro-Capital as suffering from class sclerosis. The good doctor demands that Euro-Capital move his limbs, shake his body and unclog his labor market. "But Doctor... it might cause a heart attack!" Euro-Capital pleads. Dr. America sternly smiles and responds, "Better the chance of a heart attack than the certainty of perpetual coma."

AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS

Average weekly earnings in selected

private nonagricultural industries

[For production or nonsupervisory workers;

monthly data seasonally adjusted, except as noted]

Year or month	Average gross weekly earnings	
	Total private nonagricultural ¹	
	Current dollars	1977 dollars ²
1947.....	\$45.58	\$123.52
1948.....	49.00	123.43
1949.....	50.24	127.84
1950.....	53.13	133.83
1951.....	57.86	134.87
1952.....	60.65	138.47
1953.....	63.76	144.58
1954.....	64.52	145.32
1955.....	67.72	153.21
1956.....	70.74	157.90
1957.....	73.33	158.04
1958.....	75.08	157.40
1959.....	78.78	163.78
1960.....	80.67	164.97
1961.....	82.60	167.21
1962.....	85.91	172.16
1963.....	88.46	175.17
1964.....	91.33	178.38
1965.....	95.45	183.21
1966.....	98.82	184.37
1967.....	101.84	184.83
1968.....	107.73	187.68
1969.....	114.61	189.44
1970.....	119.83	186.94
1971.....	127.31	190.58
1972.....	136.90	198.41
1973.....	145.39	198.35
1974.....	154.76	190.12
1975.....	163.53	184.16
1976.....	175.45	186.85
1977.....	189.00	189.00
1978.....	203.70	189.31
1979.....	219.91	183.41
1980.....	235.10	172.74
1981.....	255.20	170.13
1982.....	267.26	168.09
1983.....	280.70	171.26
1984.....	292.86	172.78
1985.....	299.09	170.42
1986.....	304.85	171.07
1986: Sept.....	304.67	170.59
Oct.....	306.05	171.07
Nov.....	308.33	171.96
Dec.....	305.86	170.40
1987: Jan.....	307.44	170.04
Feb.....	309.91	170.75
Mar.....	310.07	170.09
Apr.....	309.18	168.77
May.....	312.36	169.95
June.....	311.11	168.71
July.....	311.81	168.73
Aug.....	314.80	169.52
Sept.....	312.09	167.70

¹ Also includes other private industry groups

² Earnings in current dollars divided by the consumer price index on a 1977 = 100 base.

³ Based on data not seasonally adjusted.

Source: Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Midnight is passing, so let us point our craft eastward again, this time towards Moscow and the darkling plains beyond, And in a . . . but halt! Our path is blocked by luminous communist angels wailing and shedding crystalline tears.

"Why do you cry my angels?"

A spokesangel responded, "Gorbachev has stolen the hearts of the capitalist bosses but we mourn for Comrade Brezhnev."

"I thought Gorbachev was a boon for you all and Brezhnev a neo-stalinist monster in a greatcoat."

"What a fool! Did you not know that between 1976 and 1985 real wages in the USSR grew at a 2.8% annual rate? At that rate Soviet wages would have doubled between 1970 and the year 2000 while those deluded American masses would be eating out of the garbage cans of the rich. Did you not know that under the guidance of Brezhnev, Soviet wages became more egalitarian? For example, the ratio of Earnings of Engineering-technical Workers to Earnings of Production Workers between 1970-79 fell from 136.3 to 115.9. But now that renegade Gorbachev wants to trick the Great Soviet Proletariat (GSP) by promising a transformation of the wage-form that would make it open to global labor, to make the rouble a convertible currency. But this would have its price: increased wage differentials, unemployment, more "rational" pricing and lower average real wages, exploitation on the shop floor in joint ventures with capitalists, etc. Just as we were approaching Socialism comrade Brezhnev was snatched from us and this wily serpent found his way to power."

"Will the GSP be so silly as to throw its hard-won patrimony to the pigs, St. Leonid or no St. Leonid? Surely not for a pair of jeans, a PC and a glimpse of Madonna! Come my angel don't fret . . . the Turkish Baths will be filled again at 10 A.M., vodka will flow in proletarian veins and workers will sleep with their machines again."

Did you not know that under the guidance of Brezhnev, Soviet wages became more egalitarian?

"Do you think so? Perhaps . . . where do you go now?"

"South to the Tropic of Cancer. Come along, if you're free."

"Impossible," said the spokesangel, "there is a weekly Marxist-Leninist astrology class to attend . . . it is a revolutionary duty . . . you ought to come as well comrade . . ."

With that we left our garrulous friends. Taking one look back as the full moon rose over the cold, snowy, 5000 mile

long bosom of Mother Socialism, and with no regrets, we directed our ship to the heart of this our human race in the Creole belt of the planet (prudently flying above the range of small-arms fire, SAMs and Stingers, of course).

Across the waist of the world is a spectacle of real wage collapse in the 1980s. The dimensions are difficult to assess for two interrelated reasons. First, many are fighting a wise and pervasive anti-mathematical struggle against the state and international agencies under the maxim that when the state wants to count you, it is planning to tax you or kill you or both. Second, the bulk of humanity in this belt is wageless. In dollar terms, the overwhelming majority of the world's population (which lives there) ought to be dead. (Indeed, our race as a whole ought never to have started since Adam was penniless!) But midnight facts are still facts . . . there they and we are.

In the money terms that are available,

the 1980s show a dramatic reversal in annual rates of real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) for "developing" countries as a whole. After a period of growth in the 1970s at 3.4% per year, the 1980s recorded a 1% per year decline. This reversal was especially sharp in Africa, where after a modest 1.8% per year growth rate in the 1970s, the 1980s average fell to -3.8% a year. If this rate continues through the 1990s, Africa will begin the next millenium literally value-

less. The real meaning of these numbers is seen in the chronic famines and wars of counter-revolution of the period: available food cannot be bought by hungry Africans, while hungry Africans can be bought as mercenaries for a song by South Africa, the US and France.

The mechanisms of this almost total demonetization of most of the "Third World" in general and Africa in particular involve the decline in commodity prices, increasing international debt repayments, dizzying devaluations of currencies, and domestic price inflation. Thus, for example, the "real prices of commodities" (i.e., "dollar index deflated by dollar unit value of exports from developed market economies") fell by 26% in the 1981-86 period. This general commodity collapse was accelerated by the 1986 oil price catastrophe which left real oil prices at about their pre-1973 level. On top of this export debacle, the interest and principal payments on the "easy loans" of the 1970s have come due in the 1980s at inflated 1970s interest rates! The World Bank quotes is hard cop brother, the IMF, by noting: "Interest plus principal payments absorbed little more than 15% of export earnings of the group of sub-Saharan countries at the end of the 1970s. In 1986, they were estimated to rise to 36% and to rise to 38% in 1987 and 1988."

Why this trend toward the total devaluation of the lands between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn (with Africa as the most zealously chased object)? Why is capital impoverishing the Debtor so that the Debt will be unpayable? To merely state the situation baldly

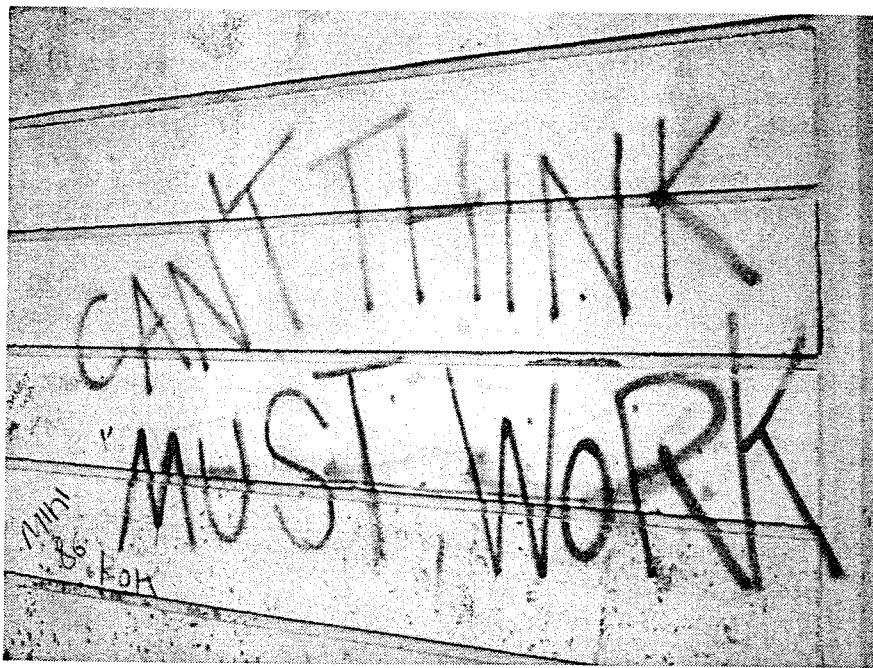


Photo by John Roosa

allows for an answer, although the details are given as debt-for-equity schemes, IMF supervising teams, "free market conditionalities" on "structural adjustment" loans, etc. **IT IS CAPITAL'S FINAL ATTEMPT TO TRULY OWN THE PLANET.**

By 1984 the path to this planetary totalization of capital seemed open: the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Reagan invasion of Grenada, the CIA mining of Nicaragua's harbors, the survival of Pinochet, the Nkomati accords, the Buhari coup in Nigeria, etc. ad nauseum, were political expressions of the drive behind the Debt Manipulations.

But at the end of 1984 the "bottom moved" and suddenly the whole game was put into question: the Black South African working class launched its housing and land struggles that put the micro-

nents.) After rounding the body and organs of the Planetary Work Machine we are ready to issue a "travel advisory" warning to our celestial friends who graciously loaned us their vehicle:

- In the US, a steadily declining real wage heading to a 1930s level by the end of the century, combined with a steadily increasing hierarchical dispersion of wages. The main response of the working class so far has been a suicidal plunge into the labor market, increased work days, personal indebtedness and poverty.

- In Europe, increasing real wages to the guaranteed are being provided with a concomitant development of "diffused camps" of wageless *desaparecidos*.

- In the USSR and Eastern Europe, an attempt at a massive retreat from the increasing real wages, reduced wage dispersion and work reduction of the Brezh-

Available food cannot be bought by hungry Africans, while hungry Africans can be bought as mercenaries for a song by South Africa, the US and France.

scopic model of capital's world hierarchy into crisis. Other nations like Mexico had declared debt payment moratoria before. When South African capital declared a moratorium in August 1985, Reagan and Company had no choice but to alter the conditions of debt repayment or face the possibility of both the collapse of their most exemplary model and the wholesale repudiation of debt. This they could not do.

As other moratoria and payment deferrals followed using the South African case as a precedent, it soon became evident that the US had to devalue its own currency—the universal universal equivalent. Within two years the US transformed itself into a Third World country in crisis, from the point of view of its balance sheets. This reversal of roles brought about the free fall 50% devaluation of the dollar in two years with a parallel devaluation of US wages.

The collapse of the value of US labor-power with respect to world standards touched off capitalist fears of a "wage reaction." Combined with the relatively low unemployment level and other factors mentioned earlier, and given the present economic strategy of US capital, this would mean increased interest rates and a recession within six months to a year. Such were the conditions causing the Crash of October 1987.

Thus we returned to our New York beginning. (The night was too short to travel over Asia and Latin America, but we do have reports from those conti-

nev years in exchange for an "international" currency.

In Africa, Central and South America, Southern Asia and Oceania, a growing tendency to a state of ZEROWAGE, i.e., slavery, food-for-work, chronic counter-revolutionary war, gigantic biological experiments conducted by Euro-American drug companies, etc.

CONCLUSION: THE PLANETARY WORK MACHINE DOES NOT WORK—AT LEAST FOR US! Even its most basic condition of existence, the provision of wages for work, is in question.

On receiving this advisory, our comrades from the stars asked, "Should we put the whole planet on quarantine? Forbid more intercourse with the galaxy for the safety of any unsuspecting travelers?"

We handed them this issue of *Midnight Notes*, saying, "Study this and then decide." As a parting gesture they flew us back to Boston, promising to inform us of their decision soon.

Midnight is long since past as we climb out to a cold winter's morning on Feb. 26, 1988 in front of the Bank of Boston headquarters, 100 Federal St. We note Mr. Donald McHenry rushing to an emergency Board of Directors meeting. McHenry was the second Black appointed to be US ambassador to the UN in the Carter Administration. Since 1980 he has been on the corporate fast track, becoming a director of the Bank, Coca-Cola and International

Paper (IP). It is in this latter capacity that he is an object of our interest and disgust.

Union workers at the International Paper mill in Jay, Maine, workers who truly provide the "ground of being" for all our words, have been on strike since June 16, 1987 refusing to accept the wage cuts and work practices demanded by IP that would undermine workers' solidarity. McHenry was among the directors who advised IP to try to break the union by provoking the strike and then immediately hiring more than one thousand scabs. Pleased with the way the strikers were apparently being isolated in a small town in central Maine, he was eager to tell his fellow directors at the Bank about the tricks of his union-busting trade. "The strike is almost smashed," he smiled inwardly. But in his elation he didn't notice something unusual going on near the entrance. "No, it can't be...!?"

So ends our tale. Later that morning a demonstration of a couple thousand IP workers and their local supporters marched to the Bank of Boston demanding that the Board either force McHenry to support the demands of the striking workers or kick him off their Board.

ENVOY

Let you who read your words
or write them on paper
remember:
the true substance of your words
is made by workers.
If these workers are scabs
so too will be your words.

Footnotes:

1. The sources for the data in this article are *The Economic Report of the President* (1987) and various issues of *Monthly Labor Review*.

As we show in *Midnight Notes* #3, *The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse*, the story of wages is both payment received and work done. Since the early 1970s, vastly more work is being extracted from the working class in exchange for lower wages. Work for capital must be understood not only as waged-work, but also as unwaged labor, in particular housework.

2. Hysterisis: the not-visible but actual onset of damage from previous wear and tear.





Social Struggles in Mexico

Introduction

by Monty Neill and Johnny Machete

*The debt is not our debt,
the people did not borrow abroad,
where then is the money,
the PRI ripped it off!*
Chanted in demonstrations against
the "Economic Solidarity Pact,"
Mexico¹

Mexico has long been the scene of imperialist conquest: the Spanish over the Native Americans, the United States seizing half of Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century and repeatedly invading that country, most recently in 1916. Mexico has also suffered economic domination by US-based capital as well as European capital.

Conquest and domination has most assuredly not meant passivity by the Mexican working people. Most important of their many struggles was the Mexican revolution that began in 1910 and continued in waves through the 1930's, through which the workers won democratic rights, trade union rights, land redistribution, access to education and health care and more.² But as a joke in Mexico City puts it, referring to the streets one can drive to reach the downtown of the world's largest city, you take Revolution to the end, turn right and you are on Reforma. Thus, as after all revolutions we know of, the struggle must, and does, continue. Despite the fruits of the revolution, the distribution of wealth and power remains extremely unequal, and has become worse in the crisis of the 1980s.

Mexico has become substantially industrialized, though it is by no means as industrialized as the U.S. or Japan. But Mexico has very low wages, even in sectors with modern technology and high levels of productivity, as in the

maquiladoras in northern Mexico. As of April 1987, the minimum wage in Mexico was only one third of subsistence levels. That is only part of the story, for Mexico has undergone a devastating economic crisis (from which of course some have made fortunes).

From the early 1950's to around 1980, the Mexican minimum wage rose from approximately 250 to 900 pesos per month. At a stable exchange rate of 12.5/dollar, this meant an increase from \$20 to over \$70/month. However, as our interview about the struggles in Chiapas makes clear, the rise of oil revenues in the 1970's spurred inflation. The Mexican government borrowed enormous sums, ostensibly for development, much of which was exported to Swiss banks, etc., or consumed in lavish living by the ruling class. And after becoming the third most indebted nation (after the US and Brazil) and oil revenues collapsed, intensified inflation and devaluation ravaged the working class. In constant terms, the minimum wage in the nation fell to 500 pesos, or \$40/month in 1985. For educators, a more middle-income position, the gain had been from about 600 in the early 1950's to a peak of around 1700 before falling under 1000 (\$80) in 1984.³

Inflation, however, is only a part of the story. The peso that for decades exchanged at 12.5/dollar bottomed out in late 1987 at 2500/dollar, a two

hundred-fold collapse in less than a decade. For the low-waged sectors of the working class, the crisis was compounded by the IMF-directed removal of subsidies on many basic products and increased prices on others. Remarked Guillermo Orozco, "One piece of bread, like a roll, was one peso. Now (10/86) it is 25. Tortillas have seen about the same increase. The subway went from one peso to 20, overnight. (In August 1987 it was 50.) Prices have more than doubled each year and wages have not kept up, not even close. I am sure many people are eating less. There are now beggars everywhere and many more of them."

The Mexican "middle class" also was hard hit and has shrunken greatly in size and wealth. "In some ways," observed Guillermo, "the middle class is most affected in terms of having to change their ways of living. The working class was already living on very little money. The Mexican middle class was living so high compared to others in Latin America. I went to Central America 12 years ago. With my Mexican pesos I could buy everything, as now you could buy everything with the dollar in Mexico. I could have the best dinner in town and pay a ridiculous amount, like one dollar. Before there was no difference between middle class people in the US and Mexico. No more. Seven years ago as a researcher,

I could make \$1000 a month. Now I cannot make \$150."⁴

Added Susan Street, "Before, upper middle class women did not work out of the house. What I notice a lot more is women making something, usually some sort of fried food, and taking it to sell on the sidewalks in front of their houses. There are a lot more peddlers, especially on buses and subways, and people singing for money. Even middle class women do this; before, it was just disabled people. Of course women, as elsewhere, do virtually all the work inside the house, but now they are also doing more work outside the house. In fact, everybody works more. There has been a vast increase in work."

The destruction of working class wages has been accompanied by a worsening of other conditions, such as health care and education, both guaranteed to much of the working class. Remarkd H., with whom we talked in Mexico City, "Capital does not want the workers in Mexico educated. The major gains of the Revolution and the struggles since then are all being taken away." The working class' loss of income has materialized as the increased wealth of Mexican and multi-national capital.

The struggles in response to the crisis PAN (Partido Acción Nacional). Much were at first quite muted. The trade unions (as becomes clear in the pieces on the struggles of the teachers and the garment workers) are heavily bureaucratized and incorporated into the state and the PRI (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional which has governed since the 1930s), forcing the workers to fight against the unions, the dominant party, the state and private capital. In the context of the crisis, the right in Mexico, as elsewhere, has made significant gains in the electoral arena through the party of private capital, the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional). Much of the middle class, observed Guillermo, supports PAN. The left, however, has not been able to capitalize on the crisis, so that the "the real opposition is now between PRI and PAN."

In Mexico, as in the US,⁵ the left essentially accepted the politics of austerity and scarcity. In 1981, the Communist Party merged with a number of smaller parties to form a Socialist party, PSUM, and in 1987 is merging with five additional groups to form the Mexican Socialist Party (PMS).⁶ Despite the maneuvering, remarked Guillermo, "The left has been unable to build anything and they have not found a new strategy. They have lost credibility and they do not know what to do."

This did not prevent the left parties from attempting to take control over the mass movements that erupted in Mexico particularly after the devastating earthquake of September 1985. As all three pieces — on Tepito, the teachers and the garment workers — reveal, the efforts of the left parties have come to naught as autonomous struggles have developed in the forms of "cooperatives and peasant unions, organizations of housewives, popular fronts of squatters and poor urban dwellers, Christian base communities, independent unions and democratic currents within official unions, centers for popular education, committees of relatives of the disappeared [in the crisis, death squads have appeared in Mexico], ecologists, housing rights movements, etc. ['Street gangs' of youth are also increasingly organizing in overtly political fashion: *Boston Globe* 9/87.]... The new social movements are creating a political culture of self-government, based on the responsibility and democratic practices of participants. They develop horizontal links among themselves, building democracy from the ground up... The popular movement[s] today in Mexico... do not form a homogenous bloc, but rather represent separate, multiple efforts that overlap in terms of their social composition (grassroots groups that share needs, workers that face similar problems), their goals (strengthening popular civil society), and their political practices (exercising direct democracy, independence from the State and political parties). What also unites

them is their status as targets of repression and the need to defend themselves as well as their determination to confront the economic crisis and avoid the imposition of a 'modernizing' economic model in which the people are simply an obstacle.

The three articles we present are each representative of the autonomous struggles that have emerged in Mexico. Two relate specifically to the aftermath of the earthquakes of September 19 and 20, 1985. The earthquakes devastated downtown Mexico City, the part of the city built on top of the ancient Aztec capital and on what was for the Aztecs a lakebed. The old colonial structures were not damaged, but many newer buildings were. Most hard hit were more recent structures, the result, remarked a tour guide at the National Anthropological Museum, of bad architecture and corruption. Noted Guillermo, "A lot of primary schools were especially damaged. They were all built by the same company, part private and part government, and the construction was very cheap. Fortunately, the earthquake hit early in the morning before the children were in school." Other workers were not so lucky, as the story of *las costureras* will show.

After the quake, the workers mobilized to rescue thousands from the rubble. Within days, however, the army began to prevent self-organized rescue operations. The media, which had initially reported both these rescues and the corruption that resulted in the poorly constructed buildings that col-



Photo by Sharon Haggins Dunn

lapsed, began to report only on government relief efforts.

The government's efforts soon turned to capitalizing on the quake by attempting to remove tens of thousands of people from downtown Mexico City and relocate them to new housing on the outskirts of the city. This process, common to "urban renewal" everywhere, not only opens up downtown land to more profitable use but also eliminates community-based centers of working class power.⁷

But the working class refused to move. Where buildings were uninhabitable, people constructed makeshift aluminum structures on the sidewalks in front. They demanded that the government expropriate the damaged housing and build or rebuild housing in the shape and size and design that the community wants. Tepito represents a clear case of the continuity of these housing demands, the social base of the movements and their complex and varied efforts to obtain their demands. Pushed by popular power, the government responded with four programs, but attempted to dictate the form and implementation of the programs. The united popular organizations (CUD), however, forced the state to recognize a cooperative and neighborhood-based power over construction.⁸

If Tepito represents the efforts of communities to define their own existence, the story of las costureras in the aftermath of the earthquake represents the efforts of new sectors of waged workers to improve their working conditions. Of the three struggles discussed here, this one has been most hindered by the repressive and bureaucratic counterattack from employer, state and union. But workers can make headway against these forces, as indicated by the continuing struggles of the teachers in Chiapas.

Education struggles are not limited to teachers in Chiapas, or even to public school teachers throughout the country. In the winter of 1986-87, over 250,000 university students in Mexico City struck to demand a broadening of access to higher education (counter to the effort to limit access that the state had proposed) and democratization of the academic, administrative and governing structures of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The strike forced the creation of a university congress in which students, academics, support workers and administrators are represented.

Workplace struggles are not limited to the schools. Massive strikes have hit Mexico, forcing the state to intervene to crush worker demands. The workers,

usually moving independent of or in opposition to the official organizations, are seeking to block further IMF austerity programs, to increase wages, and to democratize the unions. Rural workers, such as the ejidatarios discussed in the article on Chiapas, have escalated their struggles on a national level. 20,000 campesinos from independent organizations (PRI has its peasant organizations, too) marched in Mexico City to commemorate the 68th anniversary of the death of Emiliano Zapata who helped initiate the Revolution under the slogan "Land and Liberty."

After the international stock market crash of October 1987, the Mexican government instituted the "Economic Solidarity Pact," supposedly the result of agreement among the government and labor, campesino and business sectors. It should have the effect of reducing wages to one-third of their 1977 levels. The pact has provoked mass demonstrations and expropriations, and led to formation of the "National Front of Resistance to the Economic Solidarity Pact." Among its demands are recuperation of lost worker and campesino incomes, reduction and control of prices, and immediate suspension of the foreign debt payments.⁹

In Mexico the crisis is not simply an "economic" crisis of an economy crippled by huge debt, foreign domination, runaway inflation (well over 100%/year) and increasing impoverishment. It is a crisis of the whole society that is simultaneously one aspect of the worldwide crisis.

On the one side, capital seeks to further clarify Mexico's integration into the international circuits of production (under the phrase "export promotion"). This effort has required the economic crisis that the Mexican working people have experienced, and the repression that has accompanied the imposition of austerity.

On the other side, faced with the irrelevance of the traditional left, the collapse of the ability of the PRI and its state institutions to mediate the struggle and exchange benefits for support, the growing power of very right wing, pro-US capital and its party, PAN, and the daily facts of the crisis, the working class has developed myriad forms of autonomous struggles and organizations which have had varying degrees of immediate success and ability to survive. Though a mass autonomous struggle and society may be emerging in Mexico, thus far the autonomous struggles tend to be independent of each other as well as of the structures of capital.

Marx thought that the new society would have to emerge from the womb of the old. The left has traditionally viewed this statement as a problem of the hangover of capitalism into socialism. But it has, in fact, a stronger meaning: the new society will emerge through the activities of an extremely heterogeneous working class struggling against capital and within itself to create a new society.

The glimpses we see of this in Mexico are, we know, echoed elsewhere in the world. In Lima, Peru, scores of self-governing democratic communities have been settled and in Peru as a whole, estimated a high-ranking financial official, perhaps 90% of the economy is "underground."¹⁰ In Chile, in the face of one of the world's most brutal regimes, the working class is constructing new communities and defending them against the state.¹¹ Observed the author of our piece on India in this issue, "In any Indian city one will find slumdweller living and fighting just like the people in Santiago."

It is too early to know how thoroughly or how quickly these social forms can progress, how they can combine community and factory (including office and school) struggles, how internal contradictions (such as between men and women, income levels, or racial groups) will be overcome or will subvert the movements. But this much is known: if there is to be a future of working class power, these multiple, autonomous and overlapping movements are their primary form.

Footnotes

From interviews with Guillermo Orozco, Susan Street and H. *The Other Side of Mexico* #1, "Mexico's New Social Movements."

1) *The Other Side of Mexico* #4. (Available at \$8 for 4 issues/yr., to Carlos A. Heredia/Equipo Pueblo, Apartado Postal 27-467, 06760, Mexico, D.F., Mexico.)

2) The best one-volume history of Mexico in English is James D. Cockcroft, *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation and the State*, Monthly Review.

3) "Mexico: Los Salarios de la Crisis," Arturo Anguiano (ed), et al, *Cuadernos Obreros*, AC (CDSTAC), Mexico: p 86.

4) Midnight Notes has concluded that the term "middle class" is frequently misleading in that it suggests that the largely wage-earning strata to whom labels such as 'white collar' or 'middle income' are applied are not working class. However, within the working class, type of work and level of wage substantially do define a hierarchy, one that capital attempts to use politically to ensure divisions within the working class.

5) See "Lemming Notes," *Midnight Notes* #7.

6) *The Other Side of Mexico* #1.

7) C.f., "D.C.: Spatial Deconcentration," *Midnight Notes* #4, *Space Notes*.

8) "After the Earthquakes," *The Other Side of Mexico* #1.

9) *The Other Side of Mexico* #4.

10) *Latin American Journey*, television show.

11) Leiva and Petras, *Monthly Review* 7&8/87.

LAS COSTURERAS

For a large number of women garment workers, las costureras, sewers, the earthquake and its aftermath was catalyst to a struggle to unionize and to obtain better working conditions and higher wages. Prior to the earthquake, they were working under terrible conditions and few outsiders knew of their situation. They worked in the basements of old, decrepit buildings for 8-10-12 hours a day, making less than the minimum wage, not receiving benefits they were legally entitled to, and subject to harassment from company goons.

The women started before seven in the morning, so that when the earthquake hit many were already working. Because each basement had but one door, the women could not get out and many were killed. It was a disaster akin to New York City's infamous Triangle Factory Fire of 1912 in which 146 women and children burned to death when the building caught fire and they could not escape. As in New York, so in Mexico: the terrible conditions and the tragedy spurred the workers' struggle.

At first, the public did not even know these women were there, and their families could not get any insurance money. Some of the bosses attempted to destroy the buildings quickly, to bury the women in the rubble and prevent anyone from knowing about them.

The surviving women organized themselves and formed one of the most democratic unions in Mexico, "Sindicato 19 de Septiembre." Las costureras set up tents in the area and insisted they would not move until the all the bodies of the workers were pulled out. They remained for weeks until all the dead were recovered. Meanwhile, they carried away the machinery before the bosses could get it, saying that after so many deaths they had the right to the means of production. The police came to the tents and threatened and pressured and beat the women to get the machinery back and to stop the organizing.

The women linked themselves to independent unions. Most unions are part of the state, both officially and practically, but there are a few independent unions and democratic tendencies in some of the official unions. These democratic groups have challenged the *charro* leadership that controls the vertical union structures and makes corrupt alliances with government officials.

Before the earthquake, there was either no union or one that had a "sweetheart" deal with the owners to protect the company from the workers, a deal negotiated by the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) that the workers usually were not even told existed. The women denounced the official unions because they never did anything for them. When the women organized, the official unions tried to absorb them, but las costureras resisted, ensuring the enmity of these unions.

The 19th of September Union was officially registered on October 20, 1985, just one month after the earthquake. The quick recognition was due in part to the massive support the women received as their story became known. Since then, however, the union has faced a difficult battle for the actual right to represent the workers. Employers have responded with mass firings, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, and forced overtime.

At union elections at one plant, "Comercializadora," workers from other factories were brought in to vote and CTM goons attempted to prevent workers from voting. Despite this, the 19th of September Union won the vote. However, the local Labor Arbitration and Conciliation Board refused to recognize the union's victory.

To protest, the union staged a ten-day sit-in in front of the National Palace. At two in the morning of May 1, 1987, the police drove the workers from the square to clear it for the official International Workers' Day March. (The state had been using the police to ensure that independent worker organizations were excluded from the March.) Finally, the government certified the PRI-controlled CTM as the "representative" of the workers at this one factory.

The union, in addition to continuing the fight for recognition at various factories, has moved in other directions. They opened a childcare center for 100 children of las costureras and started adult education and training classes for the workers. They began to develop contacts throughout Mexico and across the border into the southwestern US. They developed a tour of speakers and a film about their struggle that has reached out to US unions and groups of women, Chicanos, students and cultural workers.

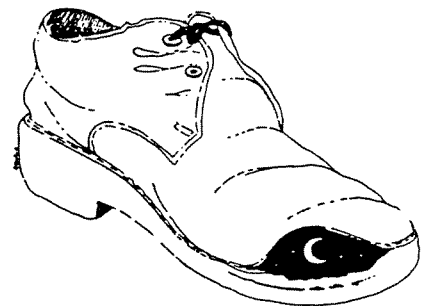
Nonetheless, by the summer of 1987 the women had suffered substantial

defeat in their ability to develop recognized unions of costureras. Within the union, many were now arguing that las costureras should not have tried to build an independent union but should have become part of the CTM and thereby entered into the efforts to democratize that union while insisting that the CTM do at least the minimum to ensure legal wages and benefits. The question is whether that sort of retreat, which would likely create despair, pessimism and a gradual withdrawal from union activity, would have ultimately been more disheartening and destructive than the clear cut defeat at the combined hands of CTM, employers and state that they suffered at Comercializadora and other plants.

In any event, and the matter is far from settled, the history of the union indicates the capacity of even the least powerful sectors of the class, very low-waged women, to organize autonomously. Las costureras put the state, the unions and the companies on the defensive and forced concessions from them, and they created international networks and independent organizations to meet their needs.

[Information for Las Costureras came from interviews with Guillermo Orozco & Susan Street, the "International Bulletin" of the costureras, and discussions with supporters of the struggle. For information about the union, their tour and film, or to receive their "International Bulletin" (in English and Spanish), contact Sindicato "19 de Septiembre," Apartado Postal M-10578, Correo Central, 06000 Mexico D.F., Mexico.]

by Monty Neill and Johnny Machete



el ñero

The Uses of an Earthquake

by Harry Cleaver

Earthquakes, floods, droughts and volcanic eruptions, when they strike where we live, are usually considered to be instances of crisis and unmitigated natural disaster. Yet, recently I have had opportunities to witness how the meaning of crisis depends entirely on one's point of view.

The opportunities have come during two visits to Mexico City. The first visit was a month or so after the major earthquake that brought widely reported death and destruction. The second was a follow-up visit seven months later. During the days and weeks following the quake, television and newsmagazine images of the anguished search for survivors, of mountainous rubble and of tent cities of the homeless had fully prepared me to find a flattened city and prostrate population.

Instead, I have found a city with quite localized destruction and one in which at least part of the population was anything but prostrate. In dozens of the poorer barrios of Mexico City, the movement of the earth sparked movements of people using the devastation in property and the cracks opened in the structures of political power to break through oppressive social relations and to improve their lives.

When the Chinese write "crisis," they use two characters, one of which means "danger" and one "opportunity." This expression points beyond the riskiness most people usually associate with crises

to the new possibilities inherent in any moment of dramatic change. The situation in Mexico City has shown just how perceptive this linguistic formation really is. Not only were the dangers created by the quake extremely complex, but so too were the new opportunities created.

Less obvious than the physical hazards of the quake, but no less real, were the economic and political risks created by this sudden disruption of social order. For the government, the earthquake was one more unexpected crisis superimposed on the foreign debt crisis and on the social tension created by austerity policies aimed at generating foreign exchange to repay the debt. Between the onset of the debt crisis in the summer of 1982 and the quake in September of 1985, neither government officials nor outside commentators ever knew whether the next devaluation or price increase would be met with acceptance or with massive social upheaval. In this atmosphere the quake posed the immediate danger of overloading the government's already taut managerial resources, rendering it unable to cope with an increasingly frustrated and angry populace. This is just what happened.

For many poor people in Mexico City, the immediate physical dangers of the earthquake were also quickly superceded by complex legal and economic dangers. Although the media focused on the photogenic collapse of major highrise buildings, far more extensive, though harder to see, were the dangerous structural cracks in thousands of buildings, especially residential houses and apartment buildings. This kind of damage left the buildings standing but made them too dangerous to inhabit. The majority of people sheltered in tents and shanties had fled such damaged, but still standing, housing.

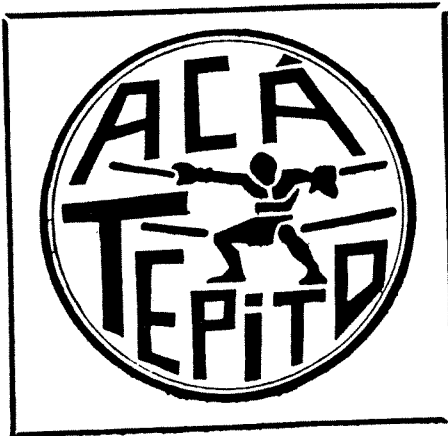
When landlords and lawyers arrived on the scene the very day of the quake, the people in the community quickly realized that the greatest threat to them would come from these owners trying to take advantage of the situation by tearing down their homes and rebuilding more expensive, higher rent properties from which the former tenants would be excluded. This possibility loomed ominously because a great deal of the housing, especially that of the

poor, had been regulated by rent control laws since at least 1948. As a result, thousands of families had been paying extremely low rents and for years landlords had made no contribution to the maintenance of the buildings. Demolition and rebuilding would allow such landlords to escape rent control by turning their former tenants out into the streets — permanently.

Anticipating such actions, thousands of tenants organized themselves and marched on the presidential palace demanding government expropriation of the damaged properties and their eventual sale to their current tenants. By taking the initiative while the government was still paralysed, they successfully forced the seizure of some 7,000 properties. Although an even larger number of damaged homes remained unexpropriated, the popular mobilization and the potential for further government action undoubtedly prevented the eviction of many otherwise unprotected tenants. With remarkable acuity these militant poor had converted an eminent danger into a promising opportunity.

How was this possible? After three years of failure to resist austerity, how could the poor successfully push their case in this period of intensified crisis? The answer is two-fold: first, the earthquake caused a breakdown in both the administrative capacities and the authority of the government; second, the ability of these people to organize themselves grew out of a long history of autonomous struggle.

The breakdown of governmental authority is the easiest to understand. Many of the modern highrise buildings that collapsed were government office buildings and the destruction of both locales and records brought sizable sections of the bureaucracy to a standstill. Among those sections were the Ministries of Programming and Budgets, the Treasury and Telecommunications. Furthermore, the destruction of high-rises in central Mexico City involved the collapse of dominant symbols of the government's only claim to legitimacy — the centralized "modernization" bought with oil revenues, borrowed capital and continued poverty. The collapse of these symbols struck to the heart of the State's confidence in itself and in its policies.



While the government was still immobilized in shock, many communities moved into action. One of those, near the center of Mexico City, which over the years had developed a practice, and indeed a reputation, for successful autonomous self-organization and militance, is called Tepito.

A relatively small community by Mexico City standards, Tepito has only about 125,000 residents in a city of some 20 million. An old, stable community, Tepito's people have lived there for generations with little influx, or outflux, of resident population. There is little influx, except by marriage, because there is little room in this densely packed community. There is little outflux because people like it there. They like the way they live and are proud of their own history of community struggle which they trace all the way back to the days of the Spanish Conquest.

To me this sense of history was intriguing but sounded at first like so much "invented tradition." Colorful but unlikely. It was only later, during a visit to the Museo Archeologico that I discovered evidence that their claims are perhaps not so exaggerated. There, on a wall in the Museum, is a large, transparent map of Pre-Columbian Mexico City superimposed on a modern map of the city. It is striking that Tepito stands today very close to the same ground as an ancient Aztec community called Tepiton. Perhaps there is more continuity in community traditions in Tepito than those outside want to admit.

However ancient its roots, Tepito survives today both within and underneath the official economy. On the surface, the work of many of its residents make Tepito the second largest producer of shoes in Mexico. They also produce clothing, stereo records, and many other goods. Complimenting this artisanal production are a wide variety of service activities such as restaurants, auto repair and retailing. Underground, Tepito's residents make their living by smuggling and bootlegging. The community's enormous open air market is known throughout Mexico City as a source of *fayuca*, cheap foreign goods smuggled in to avoid high tariffs. Under the counter of many an open air stall selling shoes is often a well illustrated catalog of hi-fi equipment available for home delivery. Less well known, but freely discussed by many, are the bootleg producers who sew American and European designer labels on Mexican jeans, who repair old Mexican irons and then glue General Electric face plates on them, or who fill empty Parisian perfume bottles with cheap substitutes.

What is fascinating about this economy is not its underground component — fairly common everywhere these days — but how little work it takes many people to make a living in it, and how much free time they have carved out to build a community around other kinds of activities. Although there are exceptions, such as shoe makers working long hours for outside capitalists at very low piece wages, the majority of the population seems able to earn enough income to live, more or less the way they would like, with as little as two to four hours of work a day on the average. These incredibly short working hours are affirmed by residents who explain that they are able to achieve this freedom from work partly by having all members of the family work (but only for a while) in the family workshop or street stall, and partly by choosing the lower income

and free time that is produced by this pattern of life.

Combine such short hours with the kind of low earnings you might expect in a Mexican barrio and you get some idea of the relatively low "standard of living" which predominates in Tepito. (Again, there are exceptions, such as smugglers who have made fortunes plying their trade.) It would seem an ideal verification of every conservative suspicion of the backward qualities of those in the underdeveloped Third World. They are poor because they want to be, because they won't work!

But "standard of living" is a slippery concept to say the least, however measured to the last peso by economists. What experience in the Third World has shown, and what the people in Tepito realize, is that hard work in the search for development via high personal in-





"Forbidden to Shit Here"; note homemade toilets.
— Harry Cleaver photo

come brings profitable results for only the successful few and nothing but exhausted and wasted lives for the majority.

Instead, a great many Tepiteños have chosen a very different approach to life and to development. By minimizing their work time they limit their individual earnings but they also create considerable quantities of disposable time both for enjoying life together and for self-organization and collective struggle for community-wide improvement. This is done quite consciously, with pride in choosing a life style based on doing things together rather than on possessing things individually. For many in the community these are simply the values of the traditional Mexican peasant community, transplanted to the city. Traditional values they consciously counterpose to those of modern Mexican capitalism.

While the Mexican economy as a whole has been plunged ever deeper into crisis during the last few years, two very interesting things have happened in Tepito. First, the underground economy has prospered as the official economy has stagnated. The daily devaluations that have driven up the price of legally imported goods have made Tepito's less expensive smuggled ones more attractive to consumers. Second, according to one social scientist who has been keeping track of such things, over this same period the number of street parties in Tepito has increased seven fold!

This multiplication of street parties is symptomatic of a thriving and in some

ways joyous community life. In Tepito life is very communal, not only in the sense of community self-organization, but also in the more basic sense that people spend a great deal of their time in the streets or in their *vecindades*: a unique housing arrangement with large central courtyards surrounded by small individual habitations. Homes are small not only because people cannot afford more space but also by choice. While they may sleep, work or make love in their small homes, they spend even more time socializing, cooking and eating together in the courtyards. There too the children play, protected by the old who sit watch at the entrances which lead from the *vecindades* to the street.

We need not romanticize (the community is by no means free of poverty or crime) to recognize how people have chosen a life rich with social interaction over one less poor in individual material wealth. Tepiteños enjoy telling stories of those "new rich" who have moved out to larger accommodations in wealthier middle class communities only to return not long after, starved for the community spirit they left behind.

One of the most important results of Tepito's approach to development has been its ability not only to defend its community integrity but to elaborate its own autonomous plans for self-development. The most important instance of defense was its ability to thwart government plans for its "renewal." When Candelaria de los Patos, a similar community not far away, was "renewed," the people of Tepito watched carefully. They saw its inhabitants

swept away, scattered throughout the city; some even took refuge in Tepito. They then saw, rising from the bulldozed ruins of that community, a giant, modern housing development: Nonoalco Tlatelolco, whose high rise apartments were quickly filled by members of Mexico's middle class. From this experience the Tepiteños concluded, correctly, that urban renewal meant the destruction of poor communities and their replacement with middle class ones — a familiar experience throughout North America.¹ So, when the government turned to Tepito and said, "Ok, its your turn," they resisted, fiercely and with imagination.

From the history I was told, how they resisted governmental pressures was creative and resourceful. Drawing on the technical help of some young architects and urban planners from the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, they elaborated their own community development plan, submitted it in an international competition sponsored by UNESCO, and won! The resulting publicity and legitimacy made it impossible for the government to move in and evict them.

The proof and the vindication of the wisdom of the people of Tepito came with the earthquake when highrise after highrise collapsed in nearby Tlatelolco. Thirty-six of the fifty-five apartment buildings were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. Thousands were killed or left mutilated and lost everything. At the same time, the older buildings in Tepito received much less damage and only five people were killed in the whole community.

Today the plan's physical model covers a whole wall of one community center. In the wake of the earthquake, the original architects, now professionals, are redrafting the detailed plans for several representative parts of the community, in consultation with the residents.

The government, of course, fiercely opposes this kind of autonomy. The hegemonic PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) and its state, which have ruled Mexico for the last 50 years, can not passively tolerate such challenge.

They have tried for years to crush or subvert this autonomous self-organization, sometimes with violence, sometimes with cooptation. The people in Tepito are well aware of these efforts. What is remarkable is how they have successfully defeated the threat.

Besides collective physical resistance to threat of violence, the most striking defense mechanism of Tepito is its chosen form of self-organization: infor-

mality and decentralization. Aware of the PRI's efforts to coopt what it cannot crush, Tepito not only has an incredibly diverse set of organizations but most are organized in a way that avoids cooptable power structures. Tepito is a living example that the absence of a strong "organization" does not necessarily mean the absence of strong organization. Every imaginable group, it seems, has organized itself in Tepito. Artisans (e.g., several different groups of shoemakers, auto repairmen, clothing makers, and bootleggers) have organized themselves along "industrial" lines; merchants have organized their own distribution and financial services by trade and by section of the community; in the streets lined with their stalls, the merchants have also organized their own police force to fight shoplifting by those from outside the community; the inhabitants of the *vecindades* have created their own active groups and then linked up with other *vecindad* groups; artists have organized Tepito — Arte Aca, one of the longest lived artist organizations in the city of Mexico; those interested in rebuilding have organized architects and community paper *El Negro* (short for *el compañero*) which has been published steadily for at least the last 14 years; and so on.

In all these cases organization is informal; there are no written rules, no presidents, no vice-presidents and no treasurers. In Tepito people speak of "leaders" rather than of heads of organizations. "Leaders," they say, are those who can get the things done that people want done. Leaders change, but the mechanisms of change are informal, the focus of discussion just shifts from some individuals to others. There is, in short, no hierarchy that can be bought off by the PRI, only individuals working together. Any decision that would seriously affect the community, or any section of it, has to be made through complex discussion and negotiation among the gamut of organizations with some interest in the matter. It is not only an effective defense mechanism, it is also an incredibly democratic, participatory form of organization.

The looseness of these diverse organizations, both in their internal workings and in their interactions would seem to imply great inefficiencies, tremendous lag times between the perception of a problem and its solution. The typical costs of democracy. And in truth this kind of organization does require a lot of time commitment, particularly considering that the different organizations cut across the community in many ways and a given individual is likely to take part in several different groups. But, as we have

just seen, life in Tepito is organized in just such a way as to make time available for this complex political life. The extraordinary amount of time devoted to such public life is reminiscent of many periods of popular revolutionary upheaval when large numbers of ordinary men and women set aside unnecessary work to seize time for their own participation in the creation of a new political order.

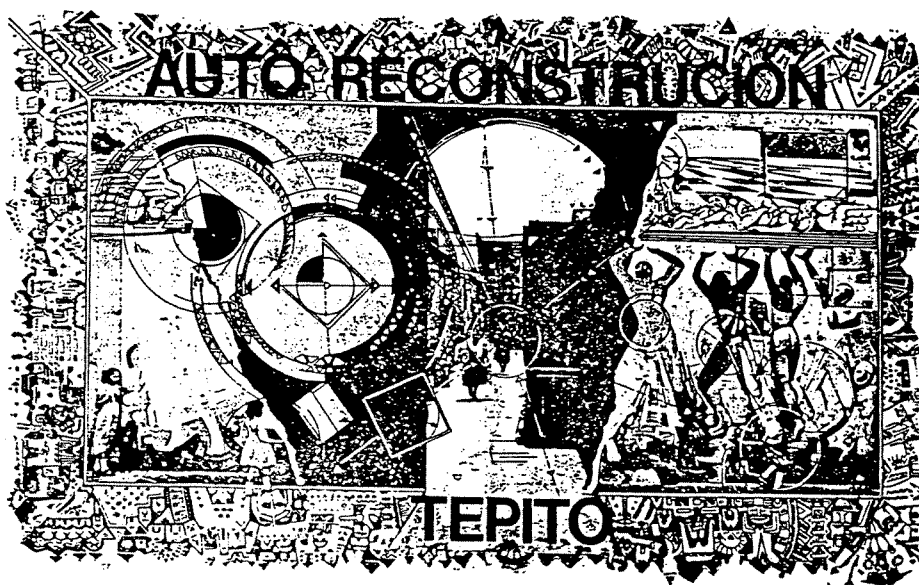
Moreover, recent history has shown that far from being inefficient, this form of organization has allowed the people of Tepito to move quickly and effectively to help themselves in an emergency and to deal with a much more inefficient, partially paralyzed government. Almost as soon as the aftershocks had ended, the Tepiteños had assessed the potential dangers posed by their landlords and moved to take preventive action. First they built their shacks and pitched their tents immediately in front of their houses, where they could defend them, refusing government and relief agency suggestions to congregate in parks and parking lots, or even to leave the city. Second, in many of the hardest hit streets they set up block organizations to coordinate relief and self-protection from street thugs and from government goons trying to intimidate them and to take control. Third, within a week of the earthquake, they had met with representatives of over 150 other communities and autonomous organizations to form a Self-Help Network to facilitate the circulation of information, talents and resources (La Red Intercultural de Acción Autonoma).

Using such methods, the people of Tepito successfully mounted their offensive to demand expropriation of damaged properties. Today, everywhere you walk in Tepito you see the large red on white signs hanging from doorways announcing that the property belongs to the federal government. The next step, in which the Tepiteños are now involved, is forcing the government to sell the properties to them at low prices and to either help them rebuild or to leave them alone while they rebuild on their own.

Some people of Tepito quickly demonstrated their ability and willingness to rebuild by themselves. Early on, they began to tear down unsafe buildings by hand — carefully preserving the building materials for later reconstruction. They have also forced the government to allow them to legally construct other things they need, such as toilets.

With some 50,000 people abruptly thrown into the streets by the earthquake, the government was forced to face the unpleasant realities of Mexico City's grossly deficient sewage situation. Even before the earthquake, it was estimated that some four million people were without flush toilets in the city. The results are notorious, a degree of public unhealthiness of staggering proportions. Mexico City, it is said, is one of the few cities in the world where you can get salmonella and amoebic dysentery from breathing the air.

Despite this situation, the Mexican government had apparently steadfastly refused to sanction the independent building of low tech, non-flush toilets by



individuals and groups desirous of changing the situation. As a result of the earthquake and the sudden, obvious increase in the number of people living and defecating in the streets, the paralyzed government could only sanction such alternative technological solutions as could be constructed by the people themselves. In support of such activities, newspapers such as *El Dia* have begun to publish technically detailed and easy to follow instructions for composting latrines. Here again, the poor of Mexico City were able to utilize the earthquake crisis to take the initiative, this time in the struggle over sewage and public health.

Despite these successful initiatives, the rebuilding needed in Tepito, and elsewhere in Mexico, is vast and beyond the financial and skill resources available to all who need help. Therefore, along with facilitating and coordinating the circulation of available resources, the Self-Help Network of community organizations has directed part of its efforts to gaining access to some of the hundreds of millions of dollars of reconstruction aid which has been offered to Mexico by a variety of international agencies (e.g., the World Bank, various countries' Red Crosses, various church groups, Oxfam, and so on).

The Network moved quickly to train community representatives to prepare proposals for reconstruction projects that could be submitted directly to foreign aid groups, bypassing the corrupt Mexican government agencies. Some of these projects have been for the physical reconstruction of housing, others have been longer range projects for the creation of workshops and community services.

In each case initiative and control remains in the hands of the local neighborhood or village group with the Network providing skills and communications. While I was in Mexico I visited a number of projects organized and financed in this manner. In each case the projects had been carried out by the local groups who were proud to show what they could do for themselves, using foreign aid but without giving up their own creativity and autonomy.

Given the Mexican government's propensities for centralized control and for contracting out work to private enterprise without consulting local groups, considerable conflict has arisen in the barrios of Mexico City over State directed reconstruction. At first, many people, tired of living in the streets, welcomed the help. But then, as they observed the type of buildings being constructed, they rebelled and angrily and directly blocked further work. As

already indicated, the people in Tepito and in many other communities, have clear ideas about how they want their community structured, including the style and architecture of their habitations. Again and again the government and its contractors have ignored or opposed their wishes, minimizing costs and constructing vertical apartment buildings without the traditional *vecindad* organization around a central courtyard. As a result, there have been many pitched battles with the government over the concrete details of reconstruction.

Danger and opportunity. The people of Tepito have proven themselves far more capable than the government both of responding to the dangers and of seizing the opportunities created by the earthquake. If the debt crisis, and now the collapse of oil prices, have thrown Mexican "development" into question as a viable path to social improvement, the earthquake crisis has brought into view a long existent but rarely recognized alternative. That alternative lies in the ability and willingness of the people of Tepito, as well as those in many other barrios, to assert a different set of values: those of autonomy, self-activity, and the subordination of work to social needs. It is also embodied in their ability, as against governmental paralysis, to design and implement their own projects, thus elaborating those values in concrete practice. Time and again, the people of Tepito are acting to meet their own needs and then presenting the

government with a *fait accompli* to be legalized ex-post.

Given the way they are organized, and their values and attitudes so antithetical to those of official Mexican capitalism, it is unlikely the government can coopt the people of Tepito. They would have to be crushed, and made over into something quite different from what they are today. Fortunately, the continuation of economic crisis in Mexico serves to preoccupy the government and forces it to stretch its resources of control. Simultaneously, like the earthquake, it creates more opportunities for the Mexican people to elaborate their won autonomy against official development plans and to take control over their own lives.

For those of us outside of Mexico, the people of Tepito have an important lesson to teach, not only about the uses of an earthquake, but about the use of crisis more generally. Every crisis involves change and contains opportunities for movement in new directions. Crises are not to be feared or "solved;" they should rather be embraced and their opportunities explored. We should always be ready to take advantage of any crack or rupture in the structures of power which confine us. Only those who benefit from these structures should fear such cracks. For the rest of us, they are openings through which we may gain access to more freedom.

Footnote:

1) For a discussion of the state's use of "urban renewal" for political control, see *Midnight Notes*#4, *Space Notes*, "Spatial Deconcentration in D.C."



el nero

Hijos de Campesinos: Teachers' Struggles in Chiapas

Monty Neill and Peter Linebaugh of Midnight Notes interviewed Susan Street about the struggles of teachers, campesinos, ejidatarios and urban dwellers (colonos) in the Mexican state of Chiapas. Susan, who has been living in Mexico since 1977, has become active in supporting these struggles. Guillermo Orozco, a Mexican national and resident of Mexico City, but not active in Chiapas, also participated. The first interview took place in Boston on October 27, 1986. A second interview, also in Boston, was done exactly one year later, October 27, 1987, and further discussions occurred in ensuing months. "Hijos de Campesinos" means "children of the campesinos."

Susan (S): Chiapas is located in southern Mexico. It borders the Pacific and shares borders with Guatemala and other Mexican states. The capital is Tuxtla Gutierrez.

Chiapas is a beautiful, tropical state. It has petroleum, coffee, cattle, they are all exported out of the state, stolen. The oil is refined in the north. The state of Tabasco also has petroleum, so the oil center is inland, along the border of Chiapas and Tabasco. Chiapas produces the most coffee in Mexico, but I can't get a decent cup of coffee when I am there.

The teacher's movement started in northern Chiapas in response to inflation based on the influx of oil money, which hit with the world-wide inflation of the mid-'70s. Prices went up tremendously. Teachers' salaries did not go up, while other people's did, like the engineers.

There were also a lot of ecological disasters. Land was both expropriated and destroyed by petroleum industry. There were campesino movements in Tabasco organizing to get repaid for the damage done to their land. These movements also started in the '70s.

Midnight Notes (M): Who are the teachers?

S: It would be fair to say a lot of the teachers in Chiapas are sons and daughters of *campesinos*. In the rural sectors, men teach. In the urban areas, most of the teachers are women. This is true in most of the southern states in

Mexico, the campesino states. Chiapas is probably the most "backward" of all, in terms of living conditions, the most "underdeveloped." It has a very high indigenous population and there is a large indigenous section of the teachers. It is the indigenous, bilingual teachers who are the most radical, well organized and active, and these really are the children of the *ejidatarios* and *campesinos*.

In Chiapas there is a small state school system and a federal system. When the movement began there were almost 15,000 Federal teachers, primary and secondary, and maybe 2,000 state teachers.

In 1979 the teachers organized and united all of them to overthrow their old union leaders. It began when a small group of teachers got together and said: "We can't take this inflation any more. We've got to do something." They spread the word to different school districts in the area and it caught on. They started organizing to demand a salary increase. The special demand of the area was to increase the cost-of-living indices. For years all the regions of Mexico have had extra pay based on the standard of living. In Chiapas the extra pay hadn't changed for something like 50 years.

In six months, they pretty much had an organization and a movement behind this demand. They took it to the state union leaders because the teachers union is a centralized national union and they had to get their union leaders to take it to the national level. The union leaders ignored it. That's when they started the political-type issue. It took off from there. They organized about 100% of the teachers in about a year. In May 1980, once they had everybody behind them, they physically seized the union, going in and kicking out the old leaders. Then they redesigned the whole system. However, they did not then change the curriculum or the pedagogy.

Teachers talk about the movement in economic terms and political terms. By economic they mean salary, by political they mean the union. Over time, the demand has become to democratize the union, throw out all the union leaders who haven't done anything for them

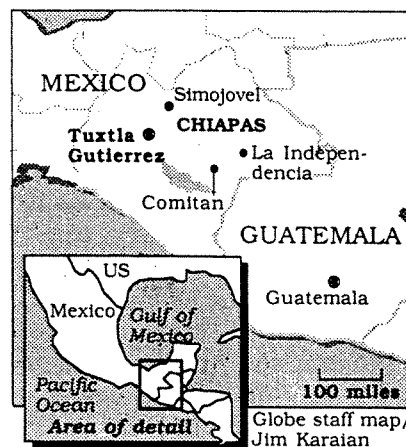
and are blocking the demands. It also means throwing out the supervisors and school directors and anybody who gets in the way of the movement.

The movement led teachers to organize to take over the schools and school districts. They demanded that the supervisors listen to and respect the teachers. There's a whole story on what the supervisors had done to teachers' work conditions and professional mobility.

In 2-3 years of struggle, they gained hardly any economic benefits. But they did get control of the union in Chiapas. They designed an entirely new, democratic union. Teachers now make the decisions about who goes to what school or zone, and all administrative and union decisions related to personnel are in their hands. To the teachers, democratization means taking control of the workplace and work-life. The movement became an organization that started to threaten the state.

M: This is after the Sandinista victory. You mention also the new refugees coming from the South. Had the movement in Guatemala or Nicaragua affected the teachers in Chiapas?

S: I don't know. The most direct effect was that about 20,000 Guatemalans crossed the border to live in Chiapas. That's a large number. It affected the entire social structure, especially the communities along the border. The Guatemalans usually settled by the



southern border, while early on most of the teacher's struggles were in the north in the petroleum area. It would have had a more direct effect on the campesinos' *luchas* (struggles) which were happening at the same time as the teachers' struggles.

Chiapas has a long history of campesino struggles. The struggles for land intensified in the 70s, as did demands against the imposition of government officials. A lot of the indigenous communities oppose the *ladinos* and the government naming officials who go against their people. *Ladinos* are Spanish-types, white, not indigenous.

M: So in Chiapas this class hierarchy corresponds to the ethnic divisions. Have the refugees from Guatemala been thrown out, heavily repressed? The European parliament voted to condemn the Mexican government for this.

Guillermo (G): There has been some struggle there. The Mexican army is there to stop Guatemalans from coming in, to visit or live. Conditions are better for them in Mexico. Since Mexicans are getting into the US, so Guatemalans should be able to get into Mexico.

There are some specific concentrations of people from Central America living right on the border, on the Mexican side. They are living in the worst conditions you can imagine. They are being exploited by the landowners even more than Mexicans are, so they have been used to displace Mexican workers, who would get higher pay.

M: Has this caused hostility between Mexicans and Guatemalans?

G: I suppose there is some, but there is no general feeling against Central Americans, not from the Mexican people. The Mexicans help hide them and share what they have.

M: What is the land and work structure in Chiapas?

S: There are ejidatarios who work on *ejidos*. An *ejido* is a piece of government land owned by the nation but worked by farmers in a collective way. There are private landholders, including a large group of *rancheros* who are the dominant group in terms of power, big farmers, but mostly not mechanized, who have held power since before the revolution. They hire people, but in some places you find *peons*, people who are not freed workers, who are tied to the land. It is a total mixture of different kinds of production.

Corn is the staple grain, and the corn issue is very important. In January

1986, ejidatarios had been demanding an increase in the price the government pays to buy their corn. They didn't get it and they didn't get it, so they took over the storehouses, and carried out other actions. They took over the highway and federal troops came in and violently apprehended 29 campesinos and teachers, seven of whom are still in jail today. Those are the corn people, and they are ejidatarios.

The corn people are organized only in one area toward central-southern Chiapas. The teachers helped organize this one struggle and are permanently involved in other struggles in Chiapas.

I was at one of the campesinos' congresses about corn. There were about 1000 corn farmers present, representing all the others. The Congress was in part an effort to get the seven leaders out of jail. Teachers are among those jailed leaders. They were talking about how the teachers helped organize in the communities, about how the teachers are always involved in the struggles as organizers, as promoters, communicators, negotiators. In fact, teachers directed this congress. When they were talking about the teachers, they would say the teachers, *hijos de campesinos*, the sons of the campesinos. That was all that counted.

The leaders of this teachers' movement have had experience in campesino movements. They really are *hijos* of the campesinos. Manuel Hernandez, who is now in jail along with two other teachers, Jesus Lopez Constantino and Jacobo Nazar, organized campesinos before he did teachers. Someone was going down a list of the teacher leaders and telling about how they were all involved in such and such a struggle at such time and such a place. That was an interview I did. While the teachers' movement was new to the teachers, the struggle itself was not new.

There is also another factor about Chiapas' history. It has traditionally been a very autonomous state. There is a tendency for Chiapas people to be Chiapas people first and then Mexican. It is very strong, you can feel it. There is a resistance to anything outside, especially the central government. They have appropriated their own history as Chiapas. This is general, not only among ejidatarios.

M: Is this an important element in what happened to the teachers?

S: It is in the sense that in different moments, as when it came time to unite with the teachers' national movement, the regional dynamic predominated. Solidarity with national groups was not always forthcoming in the precise mo-

ments it was needed most.

M: Does the fact that the teachers have a higher level of education than the rest of the people make a difference to the struggle?

S: It doesn't seem an issue. The educational level of the teachers is very low by US standards. They have to go through *normalista* school (normal school, teacher-training school). Nationally, the rules are after secondary you go to 4 years of *normalista*, though this has recently been hiked to 7 years.

G: In Mexico, primary school goes to about age 13, then secondary to age 16. Someone who is going to university has to go for three years of *preparatoria* before university. Secondary and *preparatoria* together would be high school here, maybe one year more. For a teacher, what was necessary was just the first part, secondary school, and then normal school. It is less than junior college in the U.S.

S: The *normalista* system, especially in the southern states, is not known for quality. A few rural normal schools are well known, particularly Mactumatza' in Chiapas, which has a long tradition of producing Marxist leaders. It was supported by two guerrillas from Guerrero state, Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vazquez.

M: The distinction between the economic and the political that the union makes is a classical left distinction of course. It indicates a certain formal leftism.

S: There is a certain amount of this coming out of some of the *normales*. But the rural normal schools tend to have, themselves, a whole history of struggle to survive as schools. The government wants to stamp out these rural schools because they have produced troublemakers.

G: In Mexico the national average is 3-5 years of schooling. It is less in Chiapas and with indigenous people.

M: In a sense, someone who has 12 years of schooling and can write is an "intellectual," compared to those who cannot read, in the sense of book and intellect. Someone who has gone to normal school has had enormously more schooling than the average campesino. They certainly have more than their parents and many of their contemporaries. Perhaps we could use a Gramscian label for these teachers and term them "organic intellectuals?"

S: I think so. As far as in the community, most definitely. The teacher automatically, by definition, is a leader. He

or she may be the only one who can read or write. And he or she has links with the center [the central government through the national school system and the national teachers union].

M: Let me take you to Nigeria for a moment in a little piece a *Midnight Notes* contributor sent. She talks about on the coast, in the oil area, you can walk on the beach, and you have the villages and you have the oil refineries, and they are next to each other. In this case they expropriate the best land because that is where the oil is. In the village, there is no electricity, no running water, no use of petroleum products, very little education or medical care. The oil refineries are populated not by Nigerians but Europeans and North Americans, whose food is flown in from Europe, whose only excursions to the local area are to drink some beer and buy some sex. It is a relationship between high-tech capital and not only undeveloped but under-developed regions, precisely that squashing down by ripping off that Walter Rodney discussed. Can you see that same thing in Chiapas?

S: That's pretty extreme, but it is definitely there. Those are the extremes. You see those contrasts all over. You see the large farms, large land-owners. The beef is exported. In Chiapas, they brought in the cattle and destroyed a lot of forest. Chiapas is the state with the highest malnutrition in Mexico. Yet it is where the petroleum is.

G: The only Mexican jungle is in Chiapas and it is getting destroyed by pollution, cattle, agriculture.

M: In Nigeria, many women have to scrounge wood for cooking and the oil companies just fire off the natural gas, they don't cap it and use it.

S: That's right. Same thing. There's probably a thousand examples of that.

M: Is there much electrification? And what about running water?

S: Most of Mexico has electricity. Electricity from water is one of the major products in Chiapas. Yet again, Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital city, suffers from periodic water shortages.¹

M: It seems that though "underdevelopment" in Chiapas is among the most extreme in Mexico, still, compared to Nigeria, it is "ahead." But tell us about the urban dwellers?

S: Many are people who have come in from the rural areas and have taken over land on the outskirts of the city. Over the years they have constructed their own housing. These are the traditional *paracaidistas* (in English, literally, parachutists).

Taking land in the city has become a very politicized issue. Paracaidistas or *colonos* are trying to get the tenancy to live there. For example, Colonia las Granjas in Tuxtla Gutierrez is a settlement that has refused to go through the PRI structures to get tenancy. These people have also been thrown in jail and several members have been killed and the community's base organization destroyed.

When Las Granjas was doing direct action, they were not linked into the PRI or with groups from political parties who have shown up when they organized themselves. It is the same thing with the teachers movement. Left parties tried to get in and were kicked out. Literally thrown out. The communists, I mean the socialists as they now call themselves, tried to get in. The Trotskyists have a base in part of the state and in one level, technical secondary schools, where they have been working. The parties tend to impose the national platform on to the movement.

M: Are the urban dwellers also connected to the teachers?

S: They coordinate actions. The paracaidistas, the teachers, the corn people. Tuxtla is far inland and far from the corn area. But when you do anything, you go to the capital.

Over the issue of the people in jail, they have mobilized in a coordinated way. Every group has somebody in jail or somebody who was killed recently. The urban dwellers, the corn people,

other campesino groups, a transport group, the teachers, are all involved in the struggle to free political prisoners. The teachers are asked by all these other groups to accompany them whenever they have to go somewhere, to negotiate or whatever.

M: That's the writing and reading piece, too, perhaps.

S: Yes, and politically the governor will not repress the teachers directly because of their strength.

M: But how do they relate to the national union now?

S: That's a fight that's going on daily. The national union is supposed to send them their budget. Well, the national is still not democratized.

M: Is this struggle around the teachers union national?

S: It was. It's now in the reflujó, it is going slow. More is happening in the southern states. Only in Chiapas and Oaxaca are there legalized state-level organizations. Some union delegations in Mexico City are democratized.

Second Interview:

S: After 1983, in Chiapas the state began to try to drive teachers out of their democratic positions. More recently, the state refuses to even deal with the "dissidents." This has had many important effects.

The teachers started a long strike on February 19, 1987, closing down 90% of the schools. The federal and state

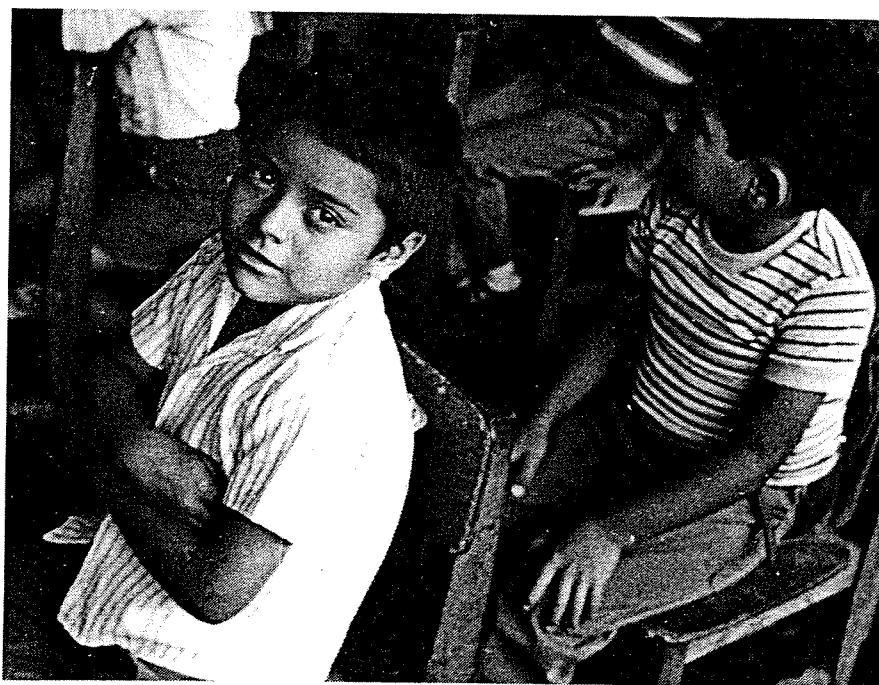


Photo by Sharon Haggins Dunn

governments, including the national union, the education ministry (SEP) and the PRI, have tried to break the Chiapaneco teachers. The old bureaucrats, the "vanguardistas," tried to regain control over the Chiapas teacher union, but they failed. When they could not smash the dissidents from below, they tried it from above. The state recognized a union organization of the old bureaucrats and no longer recognizes the democrats. Some of the dissident teachers have not been paid and are not being paid, and they are not recognized as teachers by the state. But they continue to teach anyway, and they are still united and fighting. Let me quote one of their spokesmen:

"It is not true, as is being said, that this movement is 'finished.' Democracy sustains it and any group cannot just walk in and take over the base. The teachers discuss each point to its roots, at times for hours. This impedes the "vanguardistas" from taking over, even though old supervisors keep trying to return to old times when corruption ruled, when teachers had to serve them at night or when they used to have to pay bribes and sign papers to get paid, and so on."

Earlier in the struggle, a major debate in the union was between concentrating on uniting with the parents and the community or negotiating a deal with the state for representation and reforms. After the repression began, the teachers developed stronger ties within the class. Supportive parents have provided the autonomous teachers with food and also with protection from attacks, as well as support at rallies and so on.

Education itself has become increasingly democratized. Parents and teachers have taken over some schools and partially taken over others, and made the schools part of their autonomous social space. For example, at three technical secondary schools in Tuxtla they won't allow the vanguardistas in. So the state has opened new schools staffed with its paid teachers. Now the state is threatening not to recognize the primary school certificates earned by students in the autonomous schools. The whole situation is incredibly polarized.

The students also have used the struggles for their own demands. When there are two schools, teachers have to compete for students, which has increased the power of the students. They have opposed authoritarian teachers. Sometimes the students have kept vanguardista teachers out of the schools. The more democratic teachers work with student organizations, but the

students are very active in defining their own struggles and needs.

Not only have student-teacher relations begun to change, but in the course of the struggle questions of educational content, kinds of textbooks, and so on have been raised. Parents have become more involved with in-school decisions and have begun to reject the passive role of old-style parent-teacher groups and the disconnection between school and community. Sometimes, however, a kind of localism by parents and teachers has been a problem. Union democracy is really part of a much broader counter-hegemony in the making.

There are of course many problems and the relations are very complex. Sometimes you have the parents being more authoritarian and battling with the democratic students and teachers, even at times in cases where the parents support the independent union. There are many kinds of relationships between campesinos and teachers. For example, a coopted campesino movement has ties to some teachers, an autonomous campesino movement has ties to other teachers, and so on. In some places local bosses tied to the vanguardistas exert force by promises of land or other things. But that also continues to reinforce the connections among the teachers and the campesinos and the colonos in the fights over land.

Chiapas suffers from a lot of violent repression. One teacher was killed during the strike. The colonos, campesinos and indigenous groups are taking the worst of it. But despite the repression, the movement of teachers has been

going on for nearly 10 years and I think it will continue. So will the other struggles.

Additions:

In the late fall of 1987, numbers of campesinos were shot, some killed, in a variety of locales, as the PRI leadership and the landlords fought to continue their control of land and wealth and repress campesino movements in Chiapas. Reported the *Boston Globe*, "According to ... the Mexican Academy of Human Rights, more than 100 leading government opponents have been killed in Chiapas in the last five years under the administration of a PRI governor and former army general named Absalon Castellanos" (12/27/87). But the struggle continues.

Since February 29, 1988, the state-level teachers have been on a complete strike. On March 9, the federal-level teachers began a sit-down in the central plaza of Tuxtla. At all times, about one-quarter of the 30,000 teachers are camped-out in the plaza, using a rotating system of taking turns at the sit-in while the other three-quarters work. On March 15, the three teachers still imprisoned were released along with other campesino leaders. As of the end of March, the strikes and sit-ins continued.

Footnote:

1) *The Other Side of Mexico* #4 reports that 60% of the population of Chiapas lives in rural communities, of these 90% have a life-expectancy of 46 years, the child mortality rate is 90 per 1000; of dwellings, 67% have dirt floors, 64% lack electricity, 80% lacked a sewage system, and 54% did not have drinking water.

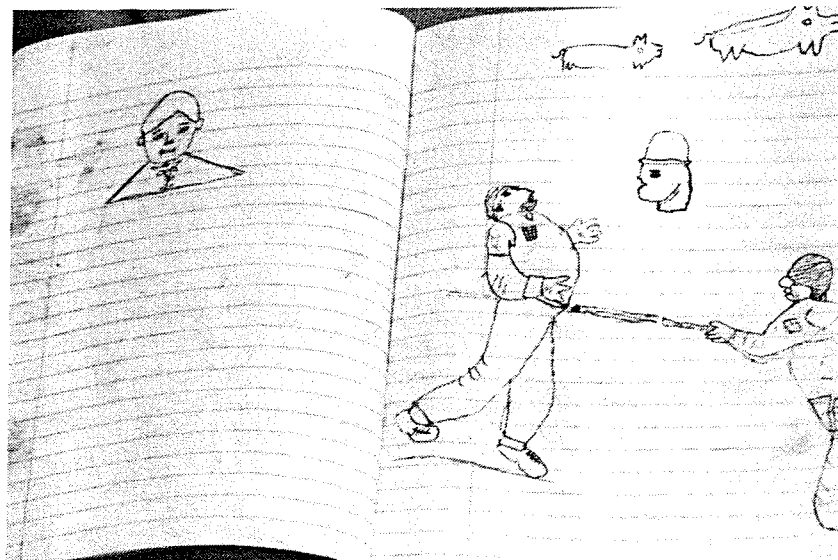


Photo by Sharon Haggins Dunn

INTRODUCTION TO RAMBO ON THE BARBARY SHORE

by George Caffentzis

*From the halls of Montezuma
to the shores of Tripoli---*
— US Marine Corps Hymn

This is the text of a speech given on May 10, 1986 in a campus symposium at the University of Calabar (Nigeria) on US policy in Africa, with special reference to the then-recent bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi which sparked many student protests in Nigeria, especially in the largely Islamic North. There was much sympathy for the Libyans; their country is, after all, the other major OPEC member in Africa, an oil price "hawk" instrumental in the oil price "shocks" of the 1970s (which made places like the University of Calabar possible), a Muslim state and an ancient terminus of a trans-Saharan trade route originating in Nigeria. Qaddafi was not a lunatic-transvestite-terrorist to the majority of students. On the contrary, the Libyan bombings further confirmed to them the Reagan regime's hostility to Third World political independence that Qaddafi represented. Not surprisingly, the most aggressive anti-US protest was in Kaduna (in Northern Nigeria) where students, predominantly from nearby Ahmadu Bello University, surrounded the US consulate, rushed past the guards and burned the US flag.

My speech aimed to show the necessity of the bombings (from a capitalist perspective) and to explain how they were possible (given the condition of the US proletariat in early 1986). Two

years later, a few more comments about the Nigerian consequences of the bombings, their US precedents and the subsequent revelations of the US-Iranian 'arms for hostages' deals are in order to amplify and contextualize the speech's analysis.

I. At the time of this writing (early 1988), the real price of petroleum is below its pre-1973 level. The mathematical reason for this is simple. Since late 1985 there has been a 50% decline in the nominal price of oil in dollar terms and a 50% decline in the exchange rate of the US dollar with respect to the other major world currencies. The "fall of the dollar" meant the end of Reaganomics, and the collapse of oil prices put "paid" to all the theories that explained the 1970s' "energy crisis" as a product of resource scarcity. If the dollar and the oil price had not collapsed simultaneously, then the US would most probably have gone into a recession in 1986 or 1987. Let us consider two scenarios: (A) petroleum remained at its real dollar value (in 1985 terms) as the dollar fell in the exchange markets; and (B) petroleum remained at its nominal 1985 price of \$28 per barrel. We can generate Table 1:

TABLE 1

	Scenario (A)	Scenario (B)
(1) Actual trade deficit 1986	\$144b	\$144b
(2) Actual trade deficit 1987	\$160b	\$160b
(3) Actual oil price 1986	\$13.50pb	\$13.50pb
(4) Actual oil price 1987	\$17.50pb	\$17.50pb
(5) Hypothetical oil price 1986	\$44.00pb	\$28.00pb
(6) Hypothetical oil price 1987	\$50.00pb	\$28.00pb
(7) = (5)-(3)	\$30.50pb	\$14.50pb
(8) = (6)-(4)	\$32.50pb	\$10.50pb
(9) Hypo. increase in trade deficit 1986	\$73b	\$35b
(10) Hypo. increase in trade deficit 1987	\$73b	\$24b
(11) Hypo. trade deficit = (1) + (9)	\$217b	\$179b
(12) Hypo. trade deficit = (2) + (10)	\$233b	\$184b
(13) Two-year hypo. increase in deficit	\$146b	\$59b

Trade deficits in the range of those calculated for scenario (A) as well as the increased US domestic inflation rate (in response to what amounts to another oil price "shock") would undoubtedly have led to an increase in interest rates and, according to most standard bourgeois theories, a recession. The effects of scenario (B) would have been milder, but they may well have been substantial enough to threaten a recession. That is, Reaganomics would have ended with a bang and not a whimper, as it did in 1986-87.

What act of grace made this relatively orderly retreat from Reaganomics possible and where did it emanate from? Was it from the stern hands of the Calvinist God who has been made so fat with electromagnetic tears, rants and sacrificial gelt of Reagan's fundamentalist allies? Hardly. The amazing grace shot straight from the home of Allah: Saudi Arabia. For the Saudi oil minister made the decision to drastically increase Saudi Arabian oil production in late 1985. The result: the oil price was below \$10 in the summer of 1986, giving the US additional time for adjustment.

Why such ecumenical zeal in Muhammad's embrace of Calvin? Why should the children of The Prophet deprive themselves to secure the salvation of the infidel? But halt... let us be a bit dialectical. The Saudi Arabian ruling class only sits on top of the oil fields, its wealth is no longer determined by that oil and its sale. Through its investments in the US and Europe (largely as a result of the recycling of the famous 1970s "petro-dollars"), the Saudis are now more dependent upon the collective health of Euro-American capital than upon the immediate sales receipts of petroleum. A recession in the US or Europe would have a more decisive effect on those subtle smiles in Riyadh than a gyration in the oil market. A mere whispered prayer from Reagan would have been enough to convince them of the need for an oil price collapse.

II. This "need" was predicated on the fall of the dollar. Why did the finance ministers of the major capitalist nations agree to this fall in Seoul in September 1985? The main interposing events for us were the insurrections in the cross-roads of South Africa.

The struggle of the "comrades" was so infectious that it touched off a series of sit-ins and demonstrations in the US in 1984-85 (recounted in *Midnight Notes* #8, 1985) for corporate disinvestment from and an economic boycott against South African capital. For the first time in the Reagan period, the campuses and official by-ways were "hot." It proved, however, rather easy to stop this phase of the US movement. On May 13, 1985 a bomb packed with C-4 explosive was dropped on a MOVE house in Philadelphia. Six adults and five children were murdered that day at 6221 Osage St., while sixty-one surrounding row houses were totally destroyed or gutted by the bomb, leaving 250 people homeless. All the dead and homeless were Afro-Americans.

It was a terrible test. . . and American officialdom waited to see what would happen. The Black movement and the anti-apartheid student movement in the US "passed" the test and effectively accepted the government's pronouncement that MOVE was an "urban terrorist" group deserving massacre. What was angrily rejected from the mouth of Botha and Buthelazi passed like honey from the mouth of the FBI (which supplied the C-4 explosive) and Black Philadelphia mayor Goode, viz., that there were good Blacks and bad ones and the latter were to be totally annihilated. The MOVE bombing did for the disinvestment movement what the Kent State-Jackson State massacres did for the anti-Vietnam war student movement: the state drew a definitive line beyond and within the movement which the movement could not cross. The success of the MOVE bombing (dead babies and all) made the decision to bomb Tripoli and Benghazi a matter of drawing a simple corollary for Reagan and company a year later.

In South African townships, where MOVE bombings were a daily affair, the insurrection drove forward, deepening the South African economic depression. By 1985 the rand collapsed on the international money market, the price of gold dropped to \$330 per oz. (compared to \$800 + per oz. in the late 1970s), the trade deficit was \$5.5 billion, agricultural production was 33% less than in 1984. . . and the loans that the South African government took out to help them ride out the early 1980s recession were coming due.

In August 1985, in the midst of a "state of emergency," South African capital decided to play a game of "chicken" with international capital by declaring a debt-payment moratorium. With the "Third World Debt Bomb" about to explode, the South African moratorium was a decisive gamble. The Reagan administration had to choose: Either to tighten the financial screws, thus threatening the financial foreclosure on South African capital and reducing its resistance to the Black struggle; Or to accept the moratorium by easing the terms of payment, especially by reducing the value of the dollar.

Why should South African debt cause such a crisis? Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Nigeria did not. The answer does not lie in the so-called "strategic minerals" of the South African soil. Rather, **South Africa is the self-conscious golden temple of the Nazi organization of labor power dominating the planet.** If the temple were desecrated by a successful Black revolt, the demoralizing ideological and political-economic effects could be catastrophic for world capital. (For example, it might stimulate the demise of the crypto-gold standard.) The struggle in South Africa is not the last anti-colonial struggle, it is the prime anti-"post modern" struggle and hence one Reagan and his class cannot afford to lose. That is why in September 1985 Reagan had to derail his whole accumulation strategy. . . on that "day the dollar die" so the dollar could live again.

III. Saudi Arabia, in the short run at least, could decisively set the world petroleum price alone. It is the "swing" producer, but it is not located at the tip of the crescent moon. A huge, sparsely populated country with its oil work force made up of Shiites and Palestinians, it is surrounded by a "sea of troubles." Shiite Iran across the Persian Gulf, South Yemen to its southern borders, Ethiopia and Africa in civil war to the west, and the Palestinian struggle to the north. This sea swells in once a year during the *hadj*, and millions of troubled pilgrims pour over the political dikes into Mecca. How can Saudi Arabia's rulers protect themselves from the reaction of the two OPEC "hawks," Libya and Iran, when it pushes the oil price into the abyss? The US could promise more radar planes and missiles, but the real problem is on the holy ground in the endless coming and going of the pilgrims.

Rambo on the Barbary Shore describes the oil price context of the Libyan bombings: they were military warnings to Qaddafi not to push the Saudis off their course. The subsequent US and US-

inspired French intervention in Chad, which led to the apparent decisive defeat of Libyan forces in Northern Chad in the spring of 1987, continued the purely military pressure.

But what of Iran? The Iran-Contra information, for all its discretion on many details and connections (thank God!), makes it clear (for those who can see the desert from the sand) that those who were central in the organization of the April 1986 Libyan bombings landed in an unmarked airplane in Teheran airport on May 25-28, 1986, for consultations with high Iranian officials. Indeed, between August 1985 and October 1986, the US government contracted to sell at least 2000 anti-tank missiles, 120 anti-aircraft missiles and spare parts for about \$100,000,000. Bombs on Qaddafi, missiles for Khomeini? A paradox? A piece of 'madness' from the Poindexter-McFarlane-Casey-North junta?

I suggest that the arms (and "intelligence" (sic!)) shipments not be interpreted as an "arms for hostages" deal, but as part of an "arms for oil price compliance" deal. This interpretation would explain the "enigma" of the affair: why did the Reagan-NSC-CIA regime risk so much in terms of "prestige" for so little, i.e., the release of a few hostages? If the reward was instead the avoidance of an economic collapse at home, we can at least stop treating these agents of international capital as plain silly. . . however plain brutal and demonic they are.

This is not what the sordid organizers of Reagan's junta claim as the motivation of their dozens of dreary meetings with equally sordid Iranian, Saudi and Israeli middlemen and small Shiite theocrats in hotel rooms and toilets across the Eurasian land mass. It was all for the hostages they said. Are they lying?

We have no midnight bugs nor polygraph tests to go beyond the "public record." All we can do is note the circumstantial evidence: the arms shipments spanned the period of the dollar's fall and the Saudi moves to subvert the oil price. Further, on examining, with much reluctance, boredom and a pure sense of *REVOLUTIONARY DUTY*, the Iran-Contra material, we note National Security Decision Directive (NSDD), "US Policy Toward Iran," of June 1985, drafted by Howard R. Teicher, who was on that secret mission to Iran a year later. This NSDD is called the "intellectual formulation" of the arms deals with Iran by the Tower Commission Report (cf. B-6-B-10). When the goals of the policy were listed, among "four immediate interests" is "(3) Maintaining access to Persian Gulf oil and transit through the Gulf of Hormuz." And in

the list of seven "longer-term goals" are "(1) Restoration of Iran's moderate and constructive role in the non-Communist political community, the Persian Gulf region and 'the world petroleum economy,'" and "(7) Iranian moderation on OPEC pricing policy" (p. B-8). There is no specific mention of hostages in the NSDD.

Of course, as one reads most of this stuff (a task which is an additional form of CIA torture!) there is no more mention of oil. It's all "hostages," "hostages" and more "hostages" . . . to the point that boredom turns to paranoia and one wonders if "hostage" is a code word. For all the talk of hostages, only three were released (four, if you include the corpse of CIA agent Buckley) during the whole August 1985-November 1986 period. On the other side, the unsaid word, "oil," underwent a substantial change: in August 1985 it was \$28pb, in November 1986 it was \$13pb. Perhaps we might say that the real hostages were not in Lebanon. They were the international bankers, stock brokers and government

officials in NY and Washington. For these hostages the anxiety and obsession of the Iran operation would be palpable and it did bring results: the "crash" was delayed for at least two years. No wonder why no one who "counts" wants to throw the book at the North-'Zulu' Poindexter-Teicher lot!

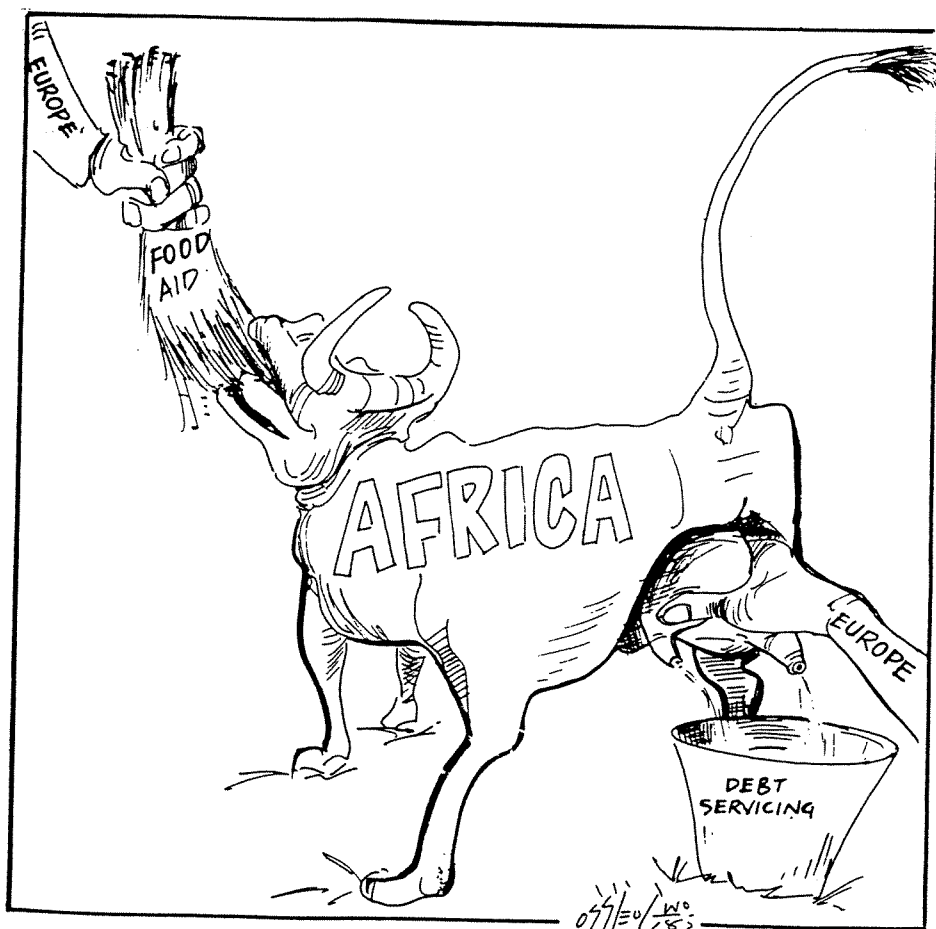
IV. This speech was given in another OPEC country, Nigeria, at a time it too experienced a version of the hostage scenario . . . but it was the Nigerian workers and peasants who were the hostages then. The Nigerian government was in debt for about \$20 billion to international banks and foreign commercial lenders. The IMF offered a \$2 billion "structural adjustment loan" to "ease" repayment, on the conditions that (1) the Nigerian currency be devalued by more than 50%, (2) the domestic price of gasoline be doubled, and (3) a liberalization of trade and foreign investment be introduced forthwith. The IMF threatened a credit squeeze and a halting of imports if the Nigerian authori-

ties did not comply. The government of General Buhari refused, but in late August 1985 General Babangida replaced his colleague in a coup. He immediately declared that the question before his new regime was whether the IMF loan and its conditionalities could be accepted. During the last part of 1985, he called for a "national debate on the IMF." He got more than he bargained for, with boisterous anti-loan demonstrations, reams of anti-IMF newsprint and endless academic debates. From the palm wine bars to the most decorous policy-making institutes, from the yam farms to the factories of Ikeja, there was an almost universal rejection of the "death pill": the IMF loan and its conditionalities. Babangida (facing the threat of a coup against him) publicly declared a definitive rejection of the IMF loan in December of 1985.

But as the price of petroleum collapsed in January and February 1986, international pressure began to build on the wharves of Europe and the US. Imports stopped and the IMF's curse took effect. An IMF team was to visit Lagos in late April "to assess the situation." There was a general sense of a Babangida double-cross in the streets and universities. The protests against the US bombing of Libya in April were also anti-IMF demonstrations.

The tension built and built until it burst on May 23 at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU). An elite "kill-and-go" police team opened fire on a student demonstration, chasing students through the campus and into a neighboring village, killing more than twenty students and townspeople. After the ABU massacre, police shootings continued throughout the country's campuses, but the students reacted sharply as well. Police stations and barracks were burnt down, policemen were ambushed and beaten, and in Ife students chanting "We are all criminals!" raided a prison, excarcerating dozens of prisoners. In Lagos, the main highways were blockaded for days by students and their street supporters. Finally the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) called for a nationwide work stoppage and demonstrations on June 4 to protest the ABU massacre.

Babangida called the military out, arrested the NLC leaders, closed the universities, and threatened to call for martial law. By the end of June 1986, "calm was restored." Babangida then verified the students' suspicions: he announced a "state of economic emergency" in light of the oil price collapse and launched a Structural Adjustment Program that, in effect, was based on the IMF conditionalities. Thus did the bombs on Tripoli explode in Nigeria.



Rambo on the Barbary Shore:

Libya, The Oil Price and the U.S. Polled

by George Caffentzis

The April 15 (1985) "raid" on Tripoli and Benghazi by US fighter-bombers poses two kinds of problems of interpretation for anyone who stands against U.S. military and economic strategy during this period. The first is to explain the reason for the raid itself, since no serious observer of US behavior accepts the explanation that Reagan, Schultz and Walters have given, viz., Libya is being "punished" for being the "focus" of "international terrorism." The second is to understand the widely divergent reaction to the raid in the US versus the rest of the planet, i.e., the "polls" in the US indicate a 75-80% approval rating for the attack, while throughout the Third World and in Europe there has been a massive condemnation. These phenomena are, of course, not independent. If there was world-wide approval for them, the attacks might have been more devastating, while if the US public "attitude" was negative they might have taken a more "covert" form (as they have in the case of Nicaragua).

I. *That which Allah giveth as spoil unto his messenger from the people of the township, it is for Allah & his messenger & for the near of kin & the orphans & needy & the wayfarer, see that it not become a commodity between the rich among you.*
— *Qur-an*LIX, 7.

As for the first problem, to even begin to get an understanding of the matter we must purge our minds of the mental pollution being spread by the U.S. government, the infinitely pliable U.S. media and the British echo. "Terrorism" is a nineteenth century word and phenomenon arising in the context of the Russian Czarist state where the bureaucratic and industrial machinery was so underdeveloped that it made sense for some revolutionaries to envision that the physical elimination of a small number of officials would seriously threaten the existence of the state.

By the early twentieth century, none but the most foolish could hold to such an illusion in Russia; the even more terrifying automaticity and anonymity of the capitalist state had been set in place. Individuals had become as replaceable as standardized parts for a model-T Ford. Some parts were more important

than others, of course, as the battery is more important than the rear-view mirror, but all were replaceable. Thus in the twentieth century, the use and abuse of terror by no means has vanished (after all, what was the hurried explosion of nuclear bombs on a near prostrate Japan in 1945 about?), but "terrorism" as a political-revolutionary strategy has all but vanished.

That in the 1980s "terrorism" and even "international terrorism" could become terms of political analysis, indeed even the purported definition of anti-capitalist struggle, shows that Power still determines Language, at least in academe and the media. Acts of guerilla war, hostage-taking, piracy, industrial or commercial sabotage (all ancient though not all "honorable" tactics perhaps in the struggle against or between states) have been called "terroristic" not because of anything intrinsic in them but simply because of the aims of their protagonists. For in contemporary parlance, to be a "terrorist act" is to be an act against US interests. This has given a field-day for columnists throughout the world to comment on the hypocrisy of the US state, for absolutely every type of act it has condemned as "terroristic," it or its servants committed, and then some. We might even long for the 1950s when the US ideology of the day was "anti-communism." At least that had some content and we could say with certainty when a state or revolutionary group could be identified independently as "communist."

Now terms like "terrorist international" are purely indexical, i.e., identifiable only with reference to the day-to-day policy decision of Washington. Thus think of the literally hundreds of anti-state armed organizations presently operating throughout the planet from Eritrea to East Timor to Northern Ireland to El Salvador to Nicaragua to South Africa. Which warrants the label "terrorist?" There is so little content in the phrase that, e.g., we have to examine the US State Department's briefings every day to determine whether the A.N.C. is a "terrorist" or "freedom fighting" organization.

The verbal silliness has reached such a point that even the phrase "terrorist state" has now entered into the glossary

of political science. But when examined carefully the phrase is either tautological or contradictory. Tautological, on the one side, since every state ultimately rules through its monopoly of violence and terror, and contradictory on the other, since terrorists are those who are outside the state aiming to physically eliminate its personnel.

But what need Reagan care for such niceties of language and thought? So in 1985 his administration devised a list of "terrorist states:" Libya, Iran, North Korea, Nicaragua, Cuba... Syria(?) This list was faithfully reported and commented upon. Since then, the issue of "terrorist states" has been placed at the top of the agenda of international conferences and bodies like the E.E.C. Do words make reality? No, but if they are US words they appear to.

Yet what do the Juche philosophers, the Shiite theocrats, the Greenbook colonels, and the Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries and bureaucrats of these lands have in common? Not much... except that they find themselves in opposition to quite varied U.S. interests. That anyone can take such nonsense seriously indicates a crisis all right, but it is a crisis in the international channel of communication due to the semantic filth being dumped in it by its most powerful "communicator." Pollution laws should not just deal with physical toxins.

For anyone who is interested in getting a more adequate analysis of the raid, one must lift the incident out of mythological realm of "terrorism" to the very pragmatic realm of international oil prices and interest rates. The oil price is one of the key indices of the world market due to the importance of the petroleum commodity itself and its role as the determiner of other energy commodity prices. This price has had four recent temporal points of inflection: 1974, 1979, 1981 and, most crucially for us, 1986.

US-Libyan relations since 1970 have centered on this index. For the U.S. state considers itself the custodian for world capital of the planet's energy resources, whether these residues of geologic evolution happen to be immediately below U.S. territory or not. This is not a Reagan invention. Carter's, Nixon's and indeed all post-WWII U.S. administra-

tions have affirmed this as an inevitable consequence of world capitalist hegemony. It is ultimately the U.S.'s responsibility to make the commodity form the destiny of Nature.

Libyans, after more than two millennia of struggles against Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Turks and Italians, found themselves after the coup that toppled King Idris in 1969 sitting on top of large but quite finite supplies of petroleum. Qaddafi is undoubtedly the expression of the Mediterranean-Saharan peoples who have lived on their wits for so long, finally finding the possibility of independent political action, increased mass consumption and capital formation...for a short but precious time. The length vitally depends upon the oil price, hence the Libyan state has been the major hawk in OPEC. Unlike Nigeria, Indonesia and Venezuela, it has a small population; but unlike Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, it has small reserves. Consequently its survival depends upon short-term price considerations. Knowing this allows us to understand the peculiar mixture of rhetoric and pragmatism in Libyan foreign policy throughout the 1970s.

During that decade, US and Libyan interests concerning oil prices coincided. Indeed for all the anti-imperialist verbiage and the ousting of the US from Wheelus Field (once the largest US airbase outside of the territorial US), the US presence in Libya grew, thriving on the commonly desired higher price of petroleum. By 1980, three thousand US businessmen and technicians were there, 10% of US oil imports came from Libya, and 30% of Libyan imports came from the US. The sacking of the US embassy in Tripoli in 1979 seemed to have no impact on the actual commercial and military relations between the two countries.

Further, the Libyan state frequently acted in Africa in ways quite favorable to the US. For example, Qaddafi was decisive in crushing the communist coup in the Sudan against Nimeiry in 1971, and Libya was a conduit for arms and troops for Idi Amin up to his fall in 1979. Thus "former" CIA agents (if such a category exists) were involved in training Libyan regular and paramilitary troops as well as procuring arms in the US. All this high-level hanky-panky was concretized when Billy Carter (the then-president's brother) tried to file as a "foreign agent" of Libya in 1979. He was apparently dissuaded, but the incident shows the interpenetration of these two states until 1981.

1981 is the year of the "oil glut" and marks a nodal point when US-Libyan relations began to become antagonistic.

The Libyans were still pushing for higher oil prices, but the US had decided that a stabilization of energy prices was crucial. Not surprisingly, it was during this year that the US military first attacked Libyan forces. Two Libyan jet fighters were shot down when they challenged US war planes crossing the "Line of Death" over the Gulf of Sytre.

Given its crucial role, a few words about this "Line of Death" might be worthwhile. In 1979 Libya passed a law that outlawed the renting and leasing of residential housing and gave immediate

The purpose of the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi was to drive home a bitter economic lesson: though the oil was below the Libyans' feet it was not theirs... occupancy does *not* give ownership. The landlord was calling to collect his due.

ownership to whoever occupied a house, i.e., occupancy became tantamount to ownership. Libya made a similar principle operative internationally. The historic Gulf of Sytre (where, according to Herodotus, Odysseus was to have stopped and nearly stayed with the Lotophagi) was declared an internal bay and a "line" connecting the lips of gulf was drawn in 1979.

For two years the US made no overt attempt to challenge the claim. It was when the Libyans had to be convinced that their hope for an ever accelerating oil price (envisioned by Carter planners a mere year before) was "unrealistic" that the Sixth Fleet jets trespassed. The message was clear—neither the Gulf nor the petroleum was really owned by Libyans—and the price of oil did stabilize.

No military confrontation occurred after the onset of the 'oil glut.' But between Dec. 1985 and March 1986, the spot price of petroleum fell from \$29 to below \$10 a barrel. Again not surprisingly, the US has attacked Libya twice since the price drop. In March, US planes crossed the "Line of Death" to sink Libyan naval vessels and bomb missile installations. The notice was clearly stated: any serious Libyan attempt to halt the price of oil from stabilizing between \$15 and \$20 a barrel would be met with more physical force. In fact, to make this point, the attacks were timed to take place just before an OPEC emergency meeting. It was a prelude to the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in April, whose purpose was to drive home a bitter economic lesson: though the oil was below the Libyans' feet it was not theirs... occupancy does *not* give ownership. The landlord was calling to collect his due.

The lack of any serious state response internationally to the raids indicate that on a nation-state level the US position is ultimately respected, for all the superficial sympathy with the Libyan people. We shall see, indeed, an end to US attacks not with the end of "terrorism"—which by definition is impossible—but with the passing of the reduced oil price. For "Libyan terrorism" is simply the belief that the petroleum resources locked in the Libyans' soil is theirs. Such presumption is intolerable, according to the present capitalist order.

II. *Is there anywhere where our theory that the organization of labor is determined by the means of production is more brilliantly confirmed than in the human slaughter industry?*

—Marx to Engels (1866)

Now that we have dealt with the reasons behind the US raids on Libya in March and April we must turn to the next question: why has there been such a divergence of public reaction to the raids in the US versus the rest of the planet (and Nigeria in particular). Certainly one feels the immediate sympathy for the Libyans here in Nigeria, especially in the North. We must remember that commercial ties between Tripoli and what is now Northern Nigeria go back for thousands of years, so there is much shared knowledge tying together the two ends of the Sahara. Further, given Libya's status as an African OPEC state it is not surprising that even the normally withdrawing Nigerian government was forced to voice some opposition to the US "raids."

But in this piece I want to turn my attention to the modern Sphinx, US public opinion, and try to explain what appears to be an even more upsetting aspect of the raids beside the sheer loss of life: the favorable attitude of the US public, as measured by opinion polls, to the raids. This attitude has been taken by many US spokespeople as a vindication and a go-ahead for any future attacks.

In dealing with such a multi-headed beast of many colors, we should be prepared to find many ironies, riddles and secrets. Since so much is being made of the polls, something should be said about how they are taken in the US and

how the socio-economic development of the Reagan period guarantees that only a certain part of the population will be asked about the raids at all.

For the first thing to note is that these polls are not administered "on the street" or "door-to-door." On the contrary, though it might be difficult for non-wealthy Nigerians (whose public life is so alive) to understand, the average American is fearful of both approaching and being approached on the street and is totally paranoid about opening doors to a stranger. This, of course, is a sign of a very advanced case of social disintegration, but its immediate consequence is that polls are conducted by telephone or through the mails.

This implies that those polled have either a fixed residential or employment address, have a telephone or are literate, and are not "deviant" (i.e., not in prison, living in a shelter, eating out of a soup kitchen, etc.). In the past these conditions might not have seriously effected opinion poll results (except perhaps in the Great Depression of the 1930s), but this is not the case in the Reagan period. Both during the recession years of 1980-1983 and the "boom years" from 1984 the following trends can be noted: an unprecedented increase in homelessness and long-term unemployment, a major increase in basic telephone rates, increases in illiteracy, imprisonment and "deviance," increases in farm foreclosures, increases in the marginality and turnover of employment.

Surely these trends have not affected everyone, but the 1980s have reproduced on an extended scale major disparities between and within the social classes of the US. The most obvious indicator has been the persistence of high unemployment in the midst of one of the longest periods of "growth" in the American economy. This unevenness has a decisive effect on the measurement of public "opinion." For example, in Philadelphia one organization for the homeless is fighting to be able to make a park bench or a parking space a "legal address" so that their members can receive the minimal benefits due to them as human beings and citizens. These homeless people are hardly likely to show up in the opinion polls. Undoubtedly there are Americans who might very well have their homes crammed with computer gear and have a satellite-receiving disc on the roof to catch the latest returns from the Singapore money market. They would be very easy to find and their opinions would be immediately tally-able.

But for the individuals outside the security lock, passing through the anonymous social gallery of marginal, "off the books" jobs, soup kitchens, jails, "half-

way houses," and back to the marginal jobs, these people who are largely Black or Hispanic, what do they think of the US raids? By definition, being unpolled, we cannot "know" their opinion, but one thing we can be sure of: they cannot be frightened by cries of "terrorism," their life is already Hell.

The fact is that though Ronald Reagan is called the "great communicator," he is communicating to fewer and fewer people. He is credited with fashioning a formidable pro-capitalist consensus in the US after more than a decade of wavering, but US society is becoming increasingly divided with the numerical majority being outside of this consensus. Under his rule, the communication channel is narrowing in a period when the technological means for communication are expanding beyond anyone's previous dreams.

This irony is no accident. Any period of rapid capital accumulation and concentration, as is occurring in the US in this decade, invariably leads to the development of social misery "on the other

But this account, so congenial to leftist theorists of mass consciousness, runs counter to another stubborn polling result. More than 50% of the polled are against aid to the contras in Honduras, while a much higher percentage are against any direct US involvement in Nicaragua. If the polled are so gullible, why haven't they been equally duped by the Presidential persuasion over the "communist-terrorist" threat in the US's backyard? Certainly Reagan has spent much more time hurling invective at the Sandinistas than at Qaddafi (if that's possible).

Some might argue that his variation in response arises from differences in the objects of Reagan's vilification and aggression. Perhaps. But I wish to argue that the reaction differs due to quite realistic assessments (based on limited and prejudicial data, of course) that the majority of the polled have made about the likelihood of protracted war (that might force a mass mobilization in the US) in dealing with either recalcitrant country.

First, Qaddafi is continually presented

True to Marx's axioms, US military policy in the 1980s is patterned on the industrial development and devolution of the US economy in the period.

pole," both domestically and internationally. Thus the Reagan "economic miracle" and military build-up have been made possible by budget deficits financed by the increased exploitation of Third World peasantries and miners, while the 1980s deflation is the result of the destruction of the US mass production sectors, union-busting, wage cutting and pauperization of significant sectors of the US proletariat. We must take with caution any talk of public opinion in the US now, for the consensus of the vocal makes the silence around them all the louder.

Among the polled, however, there is apparently general support for the April raid as well as for similar attacks in the future. This has been taken to be a great triumph for the communicative gifts of Ronald Reagan and, along with the Grenada adventure, a major change in US polled opinion which appears to be getting over the "Vietnam syndrome." To the more critical, this "triumph" is another example of the power the media have in manipulating the mental life to the US masses. Americans who have been softened up with grisly tales about Qaddafi for years seem more than willing to approve of his literal assassination on the basis of the most flimsy of charges (e.g., Libyan "involvement" in the bombing of a Berlin nightclub). Rambo rules, o.k.

as a "loony" dictator somehow disconnected from the Libyan body politic, while the Sandinistas (whatever Reagan might say about them) are clearly not a one-man show. Consequently, there is a belief that a "surgical operation" could conceivably change things in Libya.¹ No one believes this about Nicaragua.

Second, in Libya the form of military action is usually conceived of as being of a highly technological and temporary character (hence the use of the word "raid"), while in Nicaragua (given the long drawn out military failure of the contras) it is clear that any serious US intervention will be quite labor-intensive, involving ground troops in a meat-grinder terrain similar to Vietnam's.

Thus Reagan's support is conditional upon the polled's belief that these actions against Libya will be relatively costless. Perhaps Reagan is relying on a historical unconscious which remembers in a very vague way the US "war" against Tripoli in 1803-5. This might be an obscure piece of African history to Africans, but it is presented as an important event in the history curriculum of US primary schools, for it allows the racist presumptions of US pedagogy full play. (Indeed, the "Tripoli War" is "immortalized" in the US Marine Hymn.) The actual details of the story are a bit more grubby than the technicolor illustrations in the history primers, however.



In the early nineteenth century, the "Barbary" states of the Magreb (including Tripoli) declared war on the US since it refused to pay a fixed annual sum to secure the safety of its ships on the Mediterranean. The "war" was carried on in a pretty desultory fashion, with the Tripolitanian corsairs capturing a number of US cargo ships and enslaving their crews. But things got serious when a large US frigate, the *Philadelphia*, was lured close to shore by corsairs. The ship was wrecked and its 307 man crew captured.

When the regent of Tripoli, Yusuf Qaramali, demanded \$3 million ransom for the crew, the US really swung into action. It brought Yusuf's brother, Ahmad, from Egypt, installed him in Derna (a city in Eastern Libya) and

encouraged him to claim the throne of Tripoli. Fearful of an inter-family feud, Yusuf pulled back and accepted a mere \$60,000 ransom for the crew (about \$200 a head) and 'promised' not to interfere with US Mediterranean shipping. (So much for the principle, "Millions for defense, not one cent for tribute.") This was the "great American victory" over the Tripoli pirates. It was neither "great" nor a "victory," but in the vagueness of schoolbook memory the incident is probably remembered as a glorious thrust against "Arab criminals with curved swords" which cost relatively little in life, limb and money. So much for schoolbook history, and history.

If I am right about the reasons for the positive response of the US polled to the Tripoli "raid," then instead of marking

the end of the Vietnam syndrome, it gives it a definitive form. This is also true of the Grenada affair three years ago, which might sound paradoxical since Grenada has been touted as the sign of a new US public attitude to military adventure. But consider the military character of the operation. It took one week for thousands of super-armed US troops supported by the most sophisticated air and naval machines to subdue a tiny, divided and demoralized island. Why? Simply because the main aim of the operation was to lose as few US troops as possible. Hence every move had to be carefully planned and the slightest opposition had to be destroyed from a distance.

Grenada was no Iwo Jima. Militarily it was a catastrophe illustrating the contradictions US military commanders face in the field. As the Beirut car-bombing a few days before the Grenada Invasion showed, it is politically impossible to embark on military adventures where a substantial number of troops could be lost. The main consequence of this is that the "value" of US life forces up the capital-intensity of death production and makes it vulnerable to the problems of all such production: accidents, malfunctions, bad communications, etc. Thus in order to be sure there would be an absolute minimum of US losses, the Libyan operation had to be done at night with planes flying close to the sea; this meant that the whole flight had to be controlled by automated mechanisms. But this total dependence on machines forced a third of the bombers to return to base without discharging their bombs due to equipment failure.

This is a most strange militarism whose premise is the preservation of its personnel. It is one of the most perverse victories of the US proletariat. The image of Rambo is continually used as the representation of the new Reagan militarism enthusing the American masses. But on examining the image, one immediately sees the military defeat implicit in it. For Rambo is a **singular** killing machine. Gone is the mass soldier of the WWII films.

Rambo is a super death-robot, it might be totally efficient in doing its task, but its task must be extremely limited and, more importantly, it is operable only in a very restricted environment. Rambo's flying cousin, the Cruise missile, illustrates the problems of robotics. The low-flying missiles is guided by a computerized map which it matches with the information provided by its visual sensors. But what happens when it snows? All the landmarks disappear and Cruise goes crazy. Once these real problems are forgotten, we can see Rambo, the muscular killing machine, as speaking to a widespread desire, but that desire is: Let **Rambo** do it.

True to Marx's axioms, US military policy in the 1980s is patterned on the industrial development and devolution of the US economy in the period. It is premised on the Vietnam era revolt against mass military service between 1965-73, just as recent economic strategy premises the revolt of the mass factory worker in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Further, the military's "solution" — a combination of buying high-tech, automated death machines and hiring out the 'dirty jobs' to low-waged mer-

cenaries abroad — is identical to the economic "solution" — automation and computerization of domestic production and the exportation of "dirty work" to the "dirt wages" of the "free trade zones" of the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Mexico and so on. To the US proletariat's "Take This Job and Shove It," capital responded by permanent, high levels of unemployment in the US mass production industry and the "internationalization" of labor. Similarly, to the anti-war movement's "Make Love Not

like petroleum has possession in an extremely qualified manner. It can possess the resource only as long as it is actually a commodity which is exchanged according to the rules of the world market, and the final arbiter of this market is the US missile-launching submarine and aircraft carrier. Thus, those nations who have the misfortune to be "blessed by nature" with mineral deposits and oil fields are automatically in jeopardy, continually under surveillance, and open to "justifiable" attack for breach of contract

The mixture of billion dollar city-killing laser satellite systems with a \$1000 a year UNITA mercenaries now brings the polarization of the extremes into a historic tension.

War," the US state responded with a nuclear build-up, "Star Wars" and the internationalization of military "man power." The elements in both the military and economic plans are not new, of course, but the mixture of billion dollar city-killing laser satellite systems with \$1000 a year UNITA mercenaries now brings the polarization of the extremes into a historic tension.

III. *But in spite of all your fences
a poppy will bloom in the midst of your
wheat
and as your cold wind rises
it will kindle its red flames
to burn you totally down.*
— 'Chrysoula' from Rita Boumi
Papa's **1000 Killed Girls**

This tension is very consciously expressed in the fiscal instability of the US government. For the US deficit (almost twenty times the Nigerian Federal Budget) is simply identical to the increased investment Reagan has directed to capital-intensive killing machines. Ironically, but necessarily, those who actually finance these deficits — the "Third World" proletariat — are the targets of the lasers, the "smart bombs" and the disembowelings that they have bought. It is not the first time the working class has financed its own extermination. As Jay Gould, an American "Robber Baron," said a century before: "I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half." He forgot to mention that he got the funds from the victims as well.

In conclusion, what are the political consequences following on this analysis? First, the Libyan raids were meant to make clear that any state having "possession" of a vital international resource

with the "eternal" laws of capital. No nationalistic phrase-mongering can deny this reality; only participation in a struggle to totally transform how the gift of billions of years of evolution is used by the human race can change it. Libya is simply paying the price of even **slightly** tampering with the capitalist metabolism with Nature. **That** is its state terrorism. Therefore, it is crucial in our defense of Libya that we stick to essentials and not let ourselves be sidetracked by rhetoric from Washington, London, Tel Aviv, or even Tripoli, about what is at stake.

Second, the "consensus" of US public opinion on the raids indicates a crisis for the US proletariat. On the one side it indicates that the previously marginalized proletariat that might have provided some opposition to the state on this matter has simply been pushed over the horizon of communication. On the other side it indicates that the growing unification and identification of much of the proletariat with Reagan's project has a deep flaw: it presumes its own ability to escape risk. The part of the US proletariat supporting Reagan is not fascist, it is in a sense worse, for the fascists at least realized that **they** would have to do the dirty work. (Some even gloried in it.) As long as the Reagan administration can provide confidence in the automaticity of its very expensive military machine and the mercenary-ization of cannon fodder, then it need not fear any serious domestic crisis around its military adventures. But this "computerized fascist" consensus is extremely fragile and can come down with a single "shock."

— May 1986

Footnotes

1) That is, by a "classical" act of "terrorism."

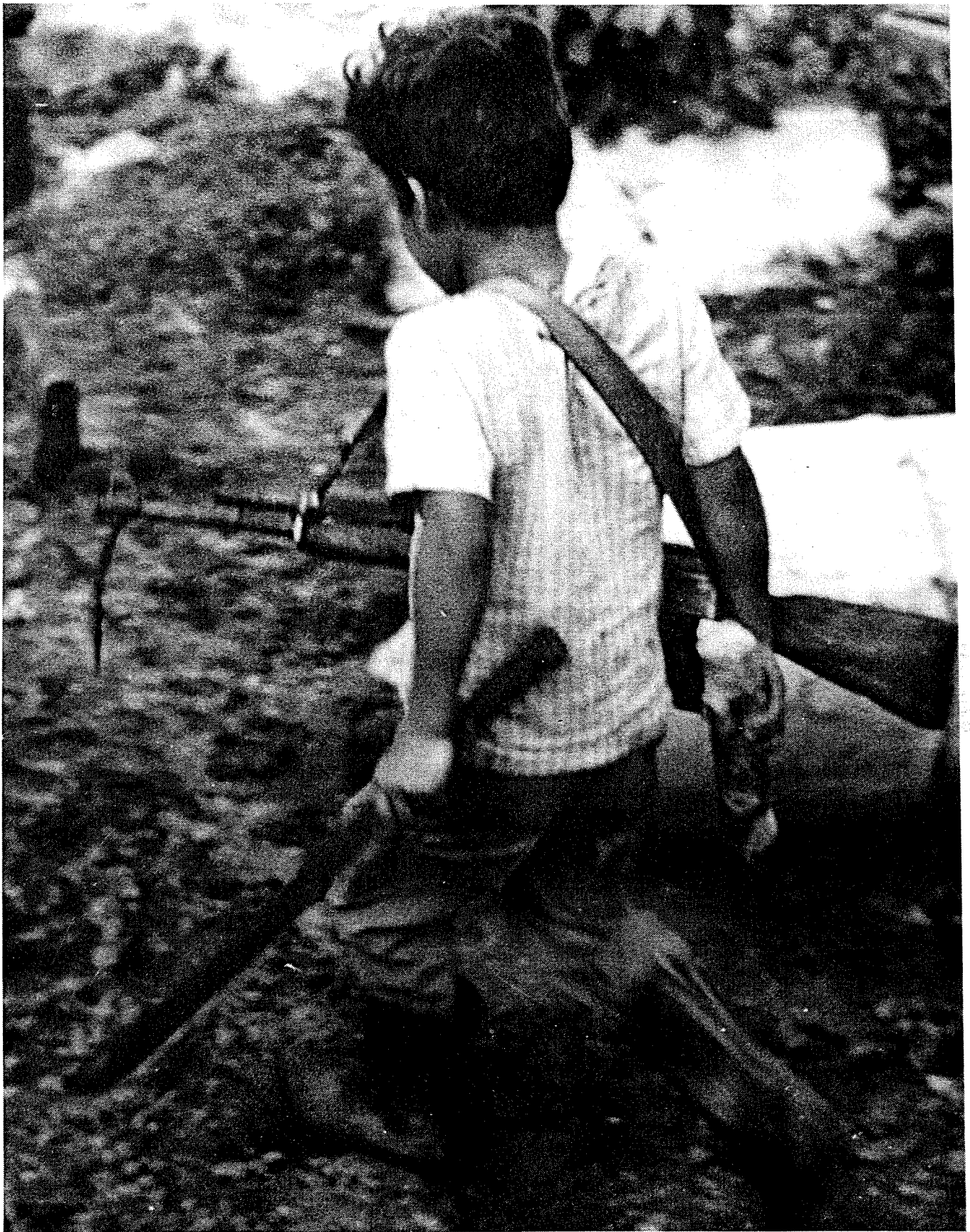


Photo by Sharon Haggins Dunn

Resistance To The Plan Has Been Heavy:

The Class Struggles of the Green Revolution of India

by John Roosa

*From the market everyday at sunset
The reporters brought the rates of grain
prices;
All those rates were laid before the King,
One by one, every evening.*

— The poet/historian Ishami
(1350 A.D.) on the price control
system of the king Alauddin Khalji
(1296-1316 A.D.) for the city of
Delhi.

The two most important staples of the Indian diet are wheat and rice; wheat most commonly consumed in the form of an unleavened flat bread and rice in the form of boiled white rice. These were the two crops Indian capital's planners, in conjunction with Western global planners, targeted after 1965 to develop under the direct control of the government. The strategy went under the name New Agricultural Strategy or under the more popular term, the Green Revolution (G.R. from now on). This article is a brief survey of the circuit of wheat and rice in India, that is to say, a survey of the various struggles over wheat and rice. By analyzing the circuit as a whole, from production to consumption, we will be able to see how seemingly disparate struggles are related, and ultimately how these struggles are related to international capital. It has now been twenty years since the G.R. was adopted as capital's primary plan to control the two basic means of subsistence of the Indian working class. What we are now witnessing is the full explosion of the contradictions of this strategy; the chickens have come home to roost.

The Green Counterrevolution

Following Independence the first strategies Indian capital developed for agriculture were the Community Development program (C.D.) and land reform. After spending at least three decades trying to channel peasant protests into a solely anti-British movement, and after spending the first four years of Independence trying to militarily defeat a large scale peasant rebellion (Telangana), capital's planners sought to create and enforce "equalitarian" social relations in the villages. In looking for a practical social peace in

which agricultural production and growth could take place, they envisioned a village system based more upon owner proprietors and farmer cooperatives than on large landlords and tenants. The landlords would be bypassed so the government could organize, amalgamate, and control farmers directly. (The land reform legislation was called "abolition of intermediaries.")¹

But the planners' airy dreams barely had an impact in the villages and where their plans were implemented the lower castes and small landowners waged their own form of a "non-cooperation movement" with the government's cooperative strategy. Every C.D. project became manipulated at the village level for the benefit of the large landlords. There was hardly ever a possibility that the villagers were going to perform "voluntary labor," which was one of the principles of C.D., when the labor went unpaid and the benefit accrued to a landlord. And certainly the landlords were not going to willingly give up any property despite the moralistic exhortations of the Gandhians. Regardless of the facts that the villagers would not cooperate with their overlords and the overlords would not cooperate with the government, the planners' primary disappointment with the C.D. strategy was that agricultural growth remained stagnant.

In 1957, when the price of foodgrains soared and the government was forced into importing even more wheat, the planners headed back to the drawing board. Their rethinking went along two paths: one was a refurbishing of the C.D. program to make it more "democratic," (this was the "*panchayat raj* program"); and the other was the Intensive Agricultural District Program (IADP). The latter was designed to target individual farmers in limited regions of the

country, unlike the C.D. program whose effects, at least in theory, were to benefit villages as a whole and whose coverage was to be nationwide.²

The initial appeal of the C.D. strategy for the planners was that the goal of agricultural growth was combined with the goal of pacifying the countryside. The planners counted on obtaining enough food for the urban and industrial working class while also stabilizing rural class relations. In the context of Telangana, China, the Philippines, etc., the Asian peasant revolution was frightening reality for both Indian and global planners. The accumulation of an urban population could not proceed controllably without first arranging agrarian social relations into some workable pattern. Yet within a decade the planners recognized that their method of killing two birds with one stone didn't even bag one bird. The social relations in the villages were not evolving into peaceful village republics. Nor was a marketable surplus forthcoming.

The effective emphasis in the first two Five Year Plans (1952-62) was industrialization, especially of 'heavy industry,' e.g. steel, coal and cement. But the crisis of 1957-8 revealed what one U.S. chronicler of India's State Plans called the "contradictions of rapid industrialization and gradual agrarian reform."³ The growth of a marketable surplus was not keeping pace with the growth of the urban working class.

Indian factory owners considered themselves blessed by God with a seemingly infinite supply of labor from the villages. In the brutal nomenclature of neoclassical economics, which is put to good use by socialist state planners, there were too many workers in agriculture. Many people could be "siphoned off" — 17 million according to one economist in 1966 — "without ad-

versely affecting agricultural output.⁷⁴ The promotion of industry would provide a "pull" away from agriculture. Yet after expropriating people from the villages, the government then faced the problem of feeding them in the cities, at least at a subsistence level. For the government, uncontrolled price rises in foodgrains meant demands for higher wages, looting of grain shops, street protests, etc. With the rapid accumulation of a proletariat in the cities, the food shortages were becoming acute. One U.S. economist writing in 1962 thought that the food "unavailability" could cause a "backflow," an entire disruption of the "pull model," meaning the people would return to the villages.⁷⁵ However, the more likely possibility was that they would continue what they had been doing: tearing up the cities.

Thus, despite God's generosity in labor power, the factory owners and the state planners considered themselves cursed with an inability to induce enough surplus food from the villagers that remained behind. The only way they coped with this problem up to the late 1960's was through importing tons of US wheat and rice through the PL-480 program (Food for Peace). The first shipments were made in 1956. The sum total of these shipments was enormous: about \$5 billion worth. By 1973 the debt the Indian government had incurred on the PL-480 account, which was repayable in rupees, equalled one-third of India's total money supply.

A second round of price increases in foodgrains in 1962, threatening "another inflationary price spiral"⁷⁶ (with all its connotations of an infinite uncontrolled progression), forced the planners into some further rethinking. They decided to concentrate on the IADP strategy for quick agricultural growth. 1962 was also the beginning of the war with China which was another factor prompting the planners to "put agriculture on a war-footing."⁷⁷

The G.R. grew out of the IADP strategy. It emerged fully in 1965 with the establishment of the government agency the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the announcement of the "New Agricultural Strategy." With the G.R., the government decided to go beyond attempts at regulating the market (primarily through the dispersal of PL-480 stocks) and reforming the villages to the ambitious plan of directly controlling the production and distribution of foodgrains. The G.R. can be outlined as follows: the government facilitates and finances productivity-increasing farming techniques in well-irrigated districts (as per the IADP), offers price incentives to the farmers for



wheat and rice, procures and stockpiles this grain, and then sells it to the urban working class through the Public Distribution System (PDS).

The government advertised this strategy as "food self-reliance" and "food self-discipline";⁷⁸ it was supposedly intended to reduce the dependency on the US for grain. But at the same time the government was advancing this *swadeshi* argument, the US government was insisting that India adopt the G.R. Thus, the G.R. has been interpreted both as an escape from and a capitulation to US imperialism. In actuality, both the US and Indian planners viewed the G.R. as the most practical solution to save capitalism in India. Both the national and global planners wanted a food system that would prevent workers from tearing up the cities and inflation from tearing up the Plan. The G.R. itself did not mark a reduction nor an intensification of dependency on the US. However, it did change the form of that dependency. In exchange for the massive dependency on the PL-480 imports⁷⁹, there was to be the dependency on further investments of foreign capital, (e.g. fertilizer com-

panies and the World Bank).

The real impetus behind the switch to the G.R. strategy came not from the U.S. government but from the Indian peasants and workers. Accompanying the intractable resistance of the peasants mentioned above, which shattered the initial C.D. plans for domestic agricultural growth, came an offensive of the industrial working class. Beginning in 1965, Indian capital was faced with the largest strike wave since the post-war years of 1946-7. The number of man days lost due to industrial strikes in 1965 was more than double the 1964 figure. After this sudden increase the figure steadily rose until the Emergency of 1975. The strength of this growing strike wave ensured that capital was unable to make the industrial working class pay for the agricultural crisis. (See the Ministry of Labor's annual reports.)

The role of the U.S. government in the G.R. might be described as that of a cruel midwife. It wanted to see the birth of India's own food system and so offered assistance throughout the birth. Yet it also exacerbated the labor pains: the U.S. government used the agricultural crisis to force some concessions

from Indian capital. In 1965 the U.S. began threatening to withhold or delay PL-480 grain shipments. Indian capital was hardly in a position to fight, for at the time PL-480 grain was their life's blood. From 1963-67 imports of wheat — of which PL-480 formed the largest component — exceeded the domestic marketable surplus by over two-thirds. In 1966 imports were more than double the quantity of the domestic surplus. Thus, in June 1966, India acceded to that quintessential neo-colonial act of capitulation: devaluation of the currency. The rupee was devalued against the dollar by one-third. After further U.S.

What we are now witnessing is the full explosion of the contradictions of the green revolution: the chickens have come home to roost.

threats of delay, (the U.S. government's "short-tether" policy begun in August 1966), the Indian government even stopped issuing its rhetorical protests against the U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

The G.R. strategy did not begin to kick in until 1968. In that year imports were less than domestic production. It was not until 1971 that PL-480 grain was discontinued altogether. Given the size of the shipments throughout the 1956-71 period, it is not surprising that both Indian and global planners wanted to switch the strategy. The U.S. had to bolster other parts of the world with its wheat politics; India, with the second largest population in the world, appeared as though it would claim all the grain. The consensus of the planners was that India would have to gain control over its own agricultural producers. They could not continue to rest upon the successes of U.S. capital's century-long struggles in the American midwest. Although the planners considered a government engineering of a domestic food system a "colossal undertaking" that was fraught with "perilous ventures,"¹⁰ it was time for their own rite of passage, their own walkabout, their own conquest. The Indian would have to pioneer forth in regions Uncle Sam never knew.

One of the most significant themes of India's post-Independence agricultural strategy has been the participation of US capital via the government, foundations, corporations, and the World Bank. From the C.D. program, which was designed, implemented, and funded in conjunction with the Ford Foundation, to the IADP which was first proposed by a team of World Bank officials in 1959 and then signed as a

"Memorandum of Agreement" with the Ford Foundation in 1960, to the PL-480 foodgrains, to the G.R. itself, US capital has advised every step of the State Plan. The US has taken every opportunity to subordinate Indian capital but they have never been able completely to dominate them. Both Indian and US capital's hired pens have called it a "two-track" relationship: a fundamental agreement between the two, with tiffs every now and then.¹¹ They know that despite occasional "sordid family quarrels" (as Marx once called inter-capitalist fights) about the degree of dependency, they remain

brothers. There is much that could be said about this topic but what is relevant here is that the import of the G.R. was to sustain and reproduce a working class in India and this was an objective both US and Indian planners fully shared.

The socialist left has never understood the G.R. in this way. The two main communist parties in India have elevated the disagreements between two symbiotic parasites to the level of the primary contradiction in India (the national bourgeoisie vs. imperialism). They support the government's PDS and, in general, "economic growth" (meaning of course capital accumulation). In fact, the point of their critiques of government policy is to argue that accumulation would proceed quicker without any kind of foreign dependency. To other leftist writers, the G.R. was "a complex system for foreign agribusiness domination,"¹² a sabotage of India's industrialization,¹³ or a compromise with imperialism that was necessitated by the Indian bourgeoisie's previous compromise with "feudalism" (by not enforcing land reform legislation).¹⁴ On the other hand, we also have the argument that the G.R. was a progressive development of the productive forces, which by creating more proletarians in agricultural production, would eventually provide the precondition for a "red revolution."¹⁵ In the same way the left has displaced the simple fact that the G.R. was a means to allow Indian capital to expropriate more people from the land, and has sometimes cheered on this expropriation, they have misunderstood the array of contradictions arising from the implementation of the G.R. This array is the subject to which we will now turn.

The Waters of Expropriation

Within the State Plan, "inputs" form the first stage of the G.R., so we'll begin there. The G.R. is most closely associated with a number of productivity-raising inputs: High Yielding Variety seeds (HYV's), chemical fertilizers, toxic pesticides, and tractors. The particular input that we will focus on is irrigation. The HYV's require intensive irrigation so it has become even more of a priority since the adoption of the G.R. Brief mention will also be made of the explosion of Union Carbide Corporation's pesticide factory in Bhopal.

Irrigation primarily means dams. They are used either to provide water directly to farms via canals or to generate electricity to power tubewells. This is their significance for capital, but for the people their significance is expropriation — direct and immediate displacement:

India has the dubious distinction of having displaced the highest number of people due to the construction of man-made reservoirs among all countries in the world. In the absence of a compendium of exact figures it is difficult to say exactly how many. However, from only 10 selected river-valley development projects an estimated 910,000 persons have either been displaced or will soon be displaced. Considering the fact that over 1,500 major dams have been built or are going to be built in the country, the magnitude of forced relocations of populations necessitated by submergence can be imagined.¹⁶

Many of the dams are not just for irrigation but the water devoted to agricultural production forms a significant part: "Between 1951 and 1982 forty-six major irrigation projects and 517 medium projects were completed, with fifty more projects nearly finished."¹⁷

The government has been able to evict millions of people with the help of World Bank and US government loans. Dam construction has been the largest single category for World Bank loans and this is no small sum, given that India presently holds the largest debt to the World Bank among all countries.

It would be impossible to adequately describe the agony and trauma that the dam-displaced people have gone through. Since the water of the dams is intended for use by farms in the plains, they are usually built upstream in relatively remote hill areas. In these areas, the people, most often tribals, (*adivasis* — literally native inhabitants),

have so far been able to escape most of capital's power. As with Native Americans, they have a strong attachment to the land, the forests, and the animals. One adivasi slogan in the state of Maharashtra during a "Land Day" protest in 1973 was "the rain falls on everyone, the sun shines on everyone, and the land belongs to everyone."¹⁸ Their sudden separation from the land means a complete destruction of their way of life. A few commit suicide rather than face a bleak future. The government never provides land for resettlement nor even monetary compensation without a fight. Even then their written promises for compensation are never fully implemented. Ironically, the displaced people often wind up working on the farms in the plains that benefitted from their displacement or on other dam construction sites.¹⁹

But not all the tribals and villagers have obediently allowed their homes to be submerged. Only rarely have they been able to stop the construction of a dam or even gain better terms for their removal, yet their resistance is growing. Organizations against dams have demanded guaranteed land for relocation (sometimes for land within the area to be covered by the dam) and for guaranteed monetary compensation. But Omvedt notes that "organizers of resistance are beginning to change their tendency to say 'the dam must be built but . . .'"²⁰ Once the demand becomes a total rejection of the dam the crucial question will be how the people to be displaced will unite with the people who are employed to actually construct the dam, who are themselves recent victims of dispossession.

Despite god's generosity in labor power, the factory owners and the state planners considered themselves cursed with an inability to induce enough surplus food from the villagers that remained behind.

In some cases the construction of irrigation facilities does not simply create more landless people but is used as a direct attack upon the landless. In 1974, the government began the Command Area Development Program expressly to impose the Green Revolution model in certain areas by integrating irrigation and other "development" work with the police and military. The World Bank has funded a large part of these command area projects. The first district the W.B. and the Indian government targeted was the Chambal valley along the border of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. This valley has



Photo by John Roosa

been notorious for its *dacoity* (banditry) and the most famous dacoits in Independent India have been from there: Man Singh, Malkan Singh, and Phoolan Devi. (There was a popular film being made about the latter who was only a teenager when she was the leader of a dacoit band. She is an untouchable and even though she is now imprisoned she remains a powerful symbol of rebellion against the upper caste-class.) Like the Thugs who looted from both the Mughals and the British in this same region, these armed dacoits steal from high-caste landowners and road travellers. Since 1974, while the dacoits have been ruthlessly repressed, irriga-

projects are actually completed, the government then faces the demands of the technicians and electrical workers who run the dams. These workers are relatively better paid and usually organized into trade unions. They frequently go on strike causing blackouts. (I can testify to the militancy of these workers in a small town in Uttar Pradesh where some of the reading for this article was done by candlelight.) The government also faces the demands of the construction workers who are rendered redundant by the dam's completion. Omvedt described a dam workers strike at an irrigation dam in Maharashtra (built for large sugar farmers). She quotes one organizer: "Our demand was that simply because the dam is finished the workers can't stop living! The dam makes the land bear fruit, production will increase ten times, the surrounding district will benefit — and the workers who built the dam can't be let down! So we said."²²

Eventually the workers were "let down," but they went on to work on a large farm nearby and to organize a union on the farm. No longer dam workers, they continued to fight as agricultural laborers.

At the level of dams then, we are introduced to the recently displaced population of India. They migrate across the countryside, they work at seasonal and temporary jobs. They often give themselves over to "contractors" who makes the arrangements for their migration and labor, a situation which in effect means bonded labor. One non-governmental agency, the Gandhi Peace Foundation, estimated

tion work — with all of the mapping of the terrain necessary for it — has been undertaken. The valley is now virtually 100% irrigated. The government has facilitated bank loans and encouraged wheat production for government procurement. The equivalent of *Time* magazine in India, *India Today*, called it a success story: "From Guns to Tractors" but it was more like "tractors with guns."²¹

Given the variety of resistances to the dams, the government has had a hard time meeting their 5-Year Plan targets. Since 1951, 55% of their irrigation projects have not been completed. If the

that there were 2.6 million bonded laborers in India.

But some of the displaced population migrates to the cities. You will see their settlements of huts scattered in and around every Indian city. They squat on any piece of vacant land and try to make some sort of home. Once in the cities they just might meet the urban flipside to the G.R.: the fertilizer and pesticide industries. This is where the Dec. 1984 disaster in Bhopal comes in.

An 'Accident' of the Green Revolution

Union Carbide began its pesticide plant in 1969 just on the edge of the city of Bhopal. In 1984 a chemical chain reaction in a storage tank produced a huge cloud of poisonous gas that blew across the city. It is easy to see how this murderous gas cloud was a result of Union Carbide's profit motive (the violations of safety precautions are far too numerous to mention) and how, on a deeper level, it was the result of the G.R.'s promotion of pesticides for the production of an agricultural surplus.²³ Yet the experience of the slumdwellers of Bhopal reveals another side to Bhopal as a result of the G.R.

Throughout the 1970's and 80's, while Union Carbide was pumping out its toxic pesticide, tens of thousands of displaced people from the countryside were "pumped" into Bhopal. They settled on the cheapest, most devalued land: that around the U.C. plant. Some of these people were perhaps displaced by the dams along the Indravati river in Madhya Pradesh, the state of which Bhopal is the capital. The new immigrants were continually poisoned by the regular "accidental" discharges of gas from the factory. Today the survivors continue to work as milkmen, cigarette rollers and sellers, tonga drivers, cycle and automobile mechanics, and office peons. None worked at the U.C. plant

While Union Carbide was pumping out its toxic pesticide, tens of thousands of displaced people from the countryside were "pumped" into Bhopal.

itself nor did they earn as much money as U.C. wage-laborers. Neither the slumdwellers nor the plant's workers were organized well-enough to stop their poisonings (at least two workers died of poisoning in the plant's 15 year history), nor were they strong enough to prevent the ultimate mass murder of Dec. 3, 1984. At least 2,500 people were killed by the poison cloud and

literally hundreds of thousands more have been left injured, blinded, traumatized, . . .

Most of the victims—it is essential to realize this—were slumdwellers. When the plant began to leak out its lethal gases in the early morning hours of Dec. 3, the first thing the slumdwellers grabbed before they fled from their makeshift shacks was the legal title to that shack, the putta (literally, address). This little fact tells a tale.

To get their addresses, the people in the slum colonies had been waging a struggle. A legally recognized address enables one to get a ration card with which one has access to government controlled commodities that are sold at subsidized prices, e.g. kerosene, sugar, wheat, and rice. (Similarly, one can not get welfare checks or credit cards in the US without an address.) The putta is also some guarantee, though one often violated, that the government will not evict you. It is a sign of ownership of land even if the land is only 40 square feet. After being expropriated from the villages, the address was their claim for the right to live in the city.

Wheat Production in Punjab

A large share of the inputs, pesticides, fertilizers, etc., is planned for use in a geographically specific area. The two northern states of Punjab and Haryana and the adjacent western section of Uttar Pradesh consume a disproportionate share of inputs in relation to their share in India's total grain production. This region is the heartland of the G.R. After feeding inputs into the region, the government then procures much of the output; in most years the area accounts for over 90% of the government's wheat procurement.

One U.S. Agency for International Development bureaucrat, reviewing the

achievements of the G.R., wrote that the "first and most significant" lesson of the G.R. was, "the successful transformation of agriculture in Punjab and Haryana [which] provided the government of India with a stable and administratively manageable source for its food reserve stock."²⁴

This successful transformation received its highest expression in Punjab.

In only two years since 1972 has its contribution to the reserve stock dipped below 50% of the total stock, and in some years it has gone as high as 75%.²⁵ Considering that Punjab has only 2% of India's population and produces approximately 22% of India's total wheat production, its contribution to the government's circuit is remarkable.

In Punjab the transformation of the state into the government's "breadbasket" has been nearly total. There is little agricultural production besides wheat and rice (usually farmers grow both crops in a year, wheat being harvested in April-May and rice in Oct.-Nov.) and very little industry. The state's entire economy is dependent on the government's procurement price. The government buys at least 75% of the wheat which is brought to market, and their procurement price functions as a minimum support price. Almost the entire production of the farmers is sold on the wholesale market—93% for wheat and 64% for rice (1978-79 figures). This is unlike all other states in India where, on the average, only 30% of either crop is brought to wholesale markets (meaning 70% is consumed by the grower, handed over to a landlord, or sold locally).²⁶

The struggle over the procurement price is the essence of the present "Punjab crisis" which recently has been in the news so much.²⁷ Particularly from 1981, the Punjab farmers, who are nearly all Sikhs, have been demanding higher procurement prices and lower input prices. For the small to medium sized farmers (usually defined as holding under 10 acres), a break even rate of return is essential for their continued existence as landowners. Although the farmers are highly stratified by size—one-half of Punjab's land is owned by less than 10% of the landowners—to some extent their religious solidarity has served to unify them both organizationally and ideologically. The Akali Dal is a political party which is based in Punjab's 700-odd gurdwaras (loosely, temples) and is explicitly a Sikh political party. And when the leaders of the Akali Dal state that in Punjab "farmer and Sikh are interchangeable terms," one can easily see what the party stands for.²⁸

The Akali Dal, along with a Punjab farmers trade union, the BKU, has led the fight against the government. The farmers have often been acting on their demands for more political power and for more concessions from the government by direct action: blockading the grain transport on the roads and railroads, boycotting the wholesale markets



Photo by John Roosa

(that is, refusing to sell their grain), and refusing to pay back bank loans.²⁹

The government's response has been state terror. Given Punjab's strategic position within the government's food-grain commodity circuit, these farmers' struggles have a profound impact. The government has spared no expense to make Punjab "administratively manageable." The state has been, in effect, under military rule since 1983, with curfews and police raids becoming a regular and fearful part of life for Punjabis. Over a thousand Sikhs have been killed and many more thousands have been imprisoned and tortured.³⁰

The government has justified martial law in the state by portraying the Sikhs as religious fanatics, terrorists, and secessionists. The government has actively promoted a communal divide between Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus ever since Independence. (After all, the government had just executed a huge and tragic communal divide between Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs by creating Pakistan and India. In Punjab 8-10 million people were displaced by Partition.) In 1966, it split the state along communal lines by forming Haryana (mainly Hindu) and Punjab (mainly Sikh). In Haryana, both the Congress Party and the opposition party, the Lok Dal, have been trying to lead the farmers movement in a communal direction. They have blatantly sponsored Hindu chauvinism and at times engineered communal "riots" (i.e. attacks on the Sikhs in Haryana). There have been actions of solidarity between the Punjabi Sikh and the Haryanvi

Hindu farmers, but it is increasingly difficult for them to overcome the government's repression and communalization.

During this period of military rule in Punjab, the government has barely increased the procurement prices for wheat and rice. In fact, taking inflation into account, they have decreased it. The government is now trying to end its price incentive strategy for these two crops. It now considers that enough production has been stimulated over the last 20 years, and it should now target its money for other crops. But the Punjabi Sikh farmers consider the 25% rate of return they got in the early 1970's as the norm. The smaller farmers whose costs of production are higher will hardly tolerate the negative profit rate the government is now proffering.

The struggle over the grain procurement price is the essence of the present "Punjab crisis."

The groups that the government labels as terrorist, extremist, and Sikh communal in actuality embody the demands of the farmers. For one example, a resolution of the group the *Damdani Taksal* reads in part:

If the hard earned income of the people or the natural resources of any nation or region are forcibly plundered; the goods produced by them set at arbitrarily determined prices while the goods bought by them are sold at high prices in order to carry this process of

economic exploitation to its logical conclusion, the human rights of a people are crushed, then these are the indices of slavery of that nation, region, or people.³¹

Unfortunately, some Sikh "extremist" groups have adopted a Red Brigadist strategy — assassinating Congress Party politicians, right-wing Hindus, and some Sikhs whom they deem collaborators of the Congress — but they have always denied responsibility for the random killings of Hindus.

Despite the government's decrease in the procurement price (in real terms) and the Sikh farmers' resistance, the government has procured record amounts of wheat and rice since 1984. By 1986, there wasn't enough storage space for all their stockpiles of grain. This huge surplus, bought on the cheap, was one of the intended results of martial law. The procurement process became in effect a military operation. Once again, in May 1987, the Punjab state government was dismissed and central government rule was declared (meaning military rule). Why May? Because that is when the majority of the wheat arrives in the wholesale markets.

The contradiction between the farmers and the government will certainly continue. The Finance Ministry states that "wheat stocks are already far in excess of the country's requirements and any further increase in these stocks is not considered desirable."³² Thus, the government will continue to keep the procurement price low. Even though it insists that it will maintain a "remunerative price" for wheat and rice-growing farmers, this does not mean that the price will be remunerative for all farmers. Smaller farmers will no doubt still be driven out of business.

Farmers throughout India continue to resist the State agricultural plan by stealing electricity for irrigation, not

paying irrigation bills on canals, and not repaying bank loans. For all of India, the government estimates that 45% of total "rural credit" is overdue for repayment (equivalent to about \$1 billion). Also there is a 10% loss of electricity due to theft, and the figure is higher for the G.R. states of north India. (Incidentally, the slum dwellers of Bhopal lighted their shacks by illegal connections to Union Carbide power lines.) Farmers organizations such as those in Punjab are well organized throughout the country, though primarily on a regional basis.³³

Migrant Labor in Punjab

It was mentioned before that one of the jobs the seasonal and migrant laborers take up is agricultural labor. Most of Punjab's G.R. farmers hire migrant laborers. According to one survey of a Punjab district, the majority of the harvesting work was done by migrant laborers.³⁴ During the peak months of April-May (for wheat) and Oct. (for rice), another study estimated that 200-300,000 men arrive in the state for work.³⁵ This is perhaps the largest regular migration of people in India. They come by train, jam-packed in the cars or riding on the roofs. The vast majority come from north Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) where the average daily wage is about 2-3 times lower than Punjab's, (which is now about \$.50-1.00, and that for about 10 hours of hard work).

This phenomenon of migrant labor, where Bihar serves as the Mexico to Punjab's California, stems from the farmers' desire to break the power of the local Punjabi laborers. With the rapid expansion of agriculture in Punjab after 1965, the local laborers were able to demand higher wages. In the terminology of the economists, the demand for labor outstripped the supply. In reality, there was no "shortage of labor;" there was only a shortage of farmers' power to drive down wages. The farmers were furious after losing so many haggles with their hired hands. The importation of laborers was begun almost immediately, yet it was not really successful in curbing the power of the workers until the mid-1970's. The farmers were able to acquire a new tactic in addition to their age-old *nakabandi* (the prevention of the striking workers from the use of the village common lands for grazing cattle, gathering fodder, and defecating, and the boycott of the workers by the local shopkeepers). The farmers were able to employ the migrant workers for the most toilsome and back-breaking jobs (e.g. transplanting rice) and pay them less. This division of labor and this wage hierarchy have severely hampered the power of both the migrant and local farm workers' struggle.

Yet the daily and persistent struggles of the laborers was an important factor behind the Punjab farmers movement. For the farmers, it appeared easier to turn on the central government than on the workers. The Akali Dal, the BKU, and the numerous "extremist" groups thought they had a better chance of increasing their rate of profit by fighting the central government than by fighting the workers. However, once

the farmers were defeated by all the imprisonment, killings, and martial law, they began turning on the workers. In April, 1987, a group known for Sikh communalism and extremism, the All-India Sikh Students Federation, betrayed its true class character by organizing a campaign to lower harvesting wages. It is encouraging to note that the workers have so far been able to resist the *nakabandis* and the physical assaults. They have prevented any decrease in the wage. One reason for their success is the present lack of migrant labor: many eastern workers have stayed away from Punjab in the last several years due to all the violence.³⁶

Within the G.R., Bihar and eastern U.P. have served as the productive sites of a relative surplus population. This is a role the region has played for almost 200 years, ever since the British conquest. In this century, hundreds of thousands of men from this region worked in the jute mills of Bengal. Today one will find their descendants scattered throughout the country, working in the industrial belt along the Bihar-West Bengal border, working on roads in Kashmir, living in the slums of Delhi... Indian state capital has been content to allow large landlords in this region to extract as much rent and labor out of their tenants (and massacre them if they object) without one concern for the productivity of agriculture with which it is obsessed in Punjab.

In this century also, the agrarian struggles in Bihar and eastern U.P. have been among the most militant and large-scale of any in India. It was in this region that Nehru and Gandhi received their initiations into the practice of pacifying peasant revolts.³⁷

To them and to other state planners, the region epitomized the non-viability of the landlord-tenant relations of production for maintaining the modicum of social peace requisite for the government's rule over agricultural production. But, as noted earlier, the planners'

Today Bihar and eastern U.P. are virtually synonymous with class struggle. Tenants and farm workers are well-organized and militant but they face repression from the state police, private armies of the landlords, and central government paramilitary troops. The clearest spectre of a red revolution growing out of the G.R. has come not from the area the G.R. developed (Punjab) but the area it underdeveloped. A question now is how this experience of struggle will be brought into Punjab by the migrant laborers. So far, the exact opposite of struggle has been brought in: a Bihar army regiment was one of several regiments the government used to assault the holiest Sikh gurdwara, the Golden Temple, in June 1984. (At least 800 Sikhs were massacred in this assault.)

Closing the Circuit

Once the farmers get the workers to produce the grain and once the government gets the farmers to sell the grain, it distributes the majority of the grain among its 322,000 "fair-price" and ration shops. All of these shops are located in the cities. Thus, the villagers are virtually excluded from the Public Distribution System (PDS). The system is further lopsided by the fact that the government sends one-half of the grain to only four states: West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Kerela, (in order of decreasing amount). The former three states contain the cities Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, respectively. These are the three largest cities in India, meaning the three largest concentrations of an industrial working class. The government sends a lot of wheat and rice to Kerela, not just because it produces little of its own, but also because it contains very powerful working class and peasant movements, a fact obliquely reflected in the social

For the Punjab farmers, it appeared easier to turn against the central government than on the workers. Once the farmers were defeated, then they turned on the workers.

early naive hopes of social reform being imposed from above were quickly dashed. As one socialist planner later recalled, Bihar and eastern U.P. have been "the graveyard of many economic planners' sturdiest hopes."³⁸ But if the "graveyard" was not an "administratively manageable" site for agricultural production, under the G.R. it has been good for the production of living labor.

democratic state government of the Communist Party of India — Marxist (CPI-M).

The overall picture of the G.R. strategy can now be seen. The grain which is grown with all of the productivity-increasing measures in the Punjab area is sent into the cities to feed the industrial working class. The whole circuit is under governmental planning

and control. For government planners, it all appears to be a rational economic machine. For socialists it also appears to be eminently rational but hindered by the bad management of intra-ruling class conflicts (the primary one in their view is that between the industrial bourgeoisie and the "rich farmers," i.e. the G.R. farmers).³⁹ But while technocrats complain about bad management, for the working class the circuit is commodity production purely and simply. It is a system that is not fundamentally different from the food circuit in the USA where it is under the control of a handful of companies and the government. One important difference to note, however, is that it is less extensive in India; presently it covers only 17% of India's total rice production and 20% of its wheat production.

The government tries to set the price to cover at least the costs of procuring, transporting, and storing the grain (which it calls the "economic cost"). Yet as one analyst writing for the Rockefeller Foundation's G.R. research center in Mexico, the one which helped develop the HYV seeds, wrote in 1979: "If grain prices are arbitrarily pegged too high, the urban labor will demand higher wages which will push up the cost curves in the industrial sector leading the economy into an inflationary spiral."⁴⁰

When 60% of urban labor's consumption expenditure is devoted to food, the government's prices translate into one of the crucial determinates of industrial sector profits.

As stated earlier, the G.R. was originally intended to control the prices of foodgrains and thus prevent "inflationary spirals" provoked by working class struggles from ruining their entire plans of capital accumulation. Because the state planners have been scared of repeating the earlier crises, they have tried to keep the selling price of wheat and rice as low as possible. In 1986 the government was procuring wheat at Rs. 162 per 100 kilos and its "economic cost" was Rs. 220. Yet at the same time the government was selling it at Rs. 190, which means they were subsidizing the price by Rs. 30. The government would like to end this subsidy but this it has not been able to do, at least not yet: The struggles of the farmers impose limits on any decreases in the procurement price and the struggles of the urban working class impose limits on any increases in the selling price.

For the people in the cities dependent on government grain, the two crucial questions are its quality and its price. The first strains of HYV wheat that the government promoted were widely dis-

liked because they were not good for making Indian bread. The HYV wheat might have grown bigger and faster than indigenous Indian strains, but its taste and the consistency of its flour were terrible. It was only after years of further tinkering that the government was able to import an HYV strain more acceptable to the people's tastes.



Photo by John Roosa

As for the price: every government attempt to raise the price of foodgrains (or any of the other "essential commodities" it sells) is met with protests and riots. These protests are usually led by women. They buy the food, prepare the bread dough, roll out the circular *chapatis*, and cook them over the fire or stove (usually kerosene stove). Gail Omvedt described some actions by the Women's Anti-Price Rise Committee in Bombay which began in 1972:

Women storming into the streets, women not marching in hundreds or thousands but in tens of thousands beneath the crowded apartments and the endless tiny shops, beating their steel or brass serving plates with heavy spoons to raise a thunderous din, women barricading the cars of politicians and storming the offices of Bombay merchant kings; women confronting the Minister for Food Supplies in his own kitchen to find out if his family eats the ration food they have to eat; women chasing after Indira Gandhi herself to call her to account for the unbearably rising prices and food shortages that are driving their families into starvation.

In the fall of 1973 they held a 20,000 women-strong Rolling Pin March:

And now the badge of the movement has become the rolling pin brandished in a clenched fist as a weapon of revolt.⁴¹

Movements against price hikes form just one part of the urban struggle. In India, as in most Third World coun-

tries, 50% or more of a city's population lives in slums. When we talk about an urban working class we are especially talking about slumdwellers. These are the people who have been expropriated by the various facets of the G.R. in the countryside. The rural to urban migration in the last 20 years has been astounding. The capital city of Delhi for instance receives about 200,000 immigrants from the villages every year. Thus, there has been an explosion of urban struggles.

For the past several years in Bombay the fight against slum demolitions by the city government and its bulldozers has become a rallying point for many other sectors of the urban working class. The demand for an address by the slumdwellers in Bhopal was mentioned before. In every Indian city there is a struggle for land, for a space to live, and at the very same time for access to food grown in the countryside. The Congress Party and city governments have tried to repress the slumdwellers with the police, bulldozers, and forced sterilization, divert them with religious communalism, and coopt them with drug, gambling, and liquor rackets. For the state planners it has been the boomerang principle with a vengeance.

Strange Loops

The strange loop phenomenon "occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started."⁴² Now that we have outlined the circuit, we can look at the ways in which it loops back on itself.

The most dreadful loop was the massacre of over 5,000 Sikhs in Delhi and thousands more in other cities in Nov. 1984, one month before the Bhopal disaster. After a Sikh body-guard murdered Indira Gandhi in revenge for the assault on the Golden

Temple, which they used to burn the Sikhs to death.

There are two important points to recognize about the Sikh massacre: first of all, the Hindu chauvinism the government whipped up to suppress the Sikh farmers in Punjab was turned against the Sikh working class in the cities; and secondly the public distribution system serves as a means of social control in the cities.

Another strange loop is the Food for Work Program. Once the government developed this circuit to feed the expropriated population in the cities, it decided to also use the surplus food against the landless in the countryside.

Every government attempt to raise the price of foodgrains is met with protests and riots led by women.

Temple, the Congress Party organized the mass killing of Sikhs in cities under their control. The cities affected worst were those where the Congress was well-organized. Thus the capital city of Delhi experienced the worst carnage. There were no attacks on Sikhs in opposition party-led states like West Bengal. The fact that the Congress did it is undeniable, why they did it is an open question. Most probably it was a power grab within the Congress Party itself. But the question relevant here is how they did it.⁴³

During the Emergency from 1975-77, the Congress demolished all the slums in and around Delhi and moved the people to the outskirts of the city. The housing colonies built by the Congress government made control over the people much easier than in makeshift and crowded slums. Within these housing colonies, the Congress organized a patronage system wherein the people were dependent upon local party bosses, *dadas*, for jobs. These *dadas* have promoted right-wing Hindu groups (which now proliferate in Delhi) and have maintained Mafia-like crime rackets. For the Sikh massacre, the *dadas* organized the men underneath them to loot and kill the Sikhs. Thus, *the mass killings of Delhi Sikhs occurred only in these Congress-controlled slum colonies on the outskirts of Delhi.*⁴⁴

The killing was done systematically. The bands of looters and murderers held the ration lists of the housing colonies which gave everyone's name and address. From the names they knew who was Sikh, and from the addresses knew where they lived. The bands also had quantities of kerosene from the government ration shops

In 1977 it began to put people to work by paying them in foodgrains. During the period 1977-80, it used 9% of its total foodgrain procurement to "generate" 99 million man-days of work. After 1980, the program was renamed and cash wages were added to the payment in grain. The work that the government has delegated to this program is road construction, which, according to a government reference manual, "provides facilities for trade and commerce." Once again, the expropriated are employed to further build the very means of their expropriation.

Another loop of the G.R. is the decline in the production of lentils and oilseeds. By offering high prices for only wheat and rice, two other staples of the Indian diet, lentils (*dal*) and cooking oil (*tel*), have been implicitly discouraged. The per capita consumption of both these staples has declined since Independence. The government is now preparing for the Seventh Five-Year Plan, a program to shift the price incentive strategy to lentils and oilseeds. In 1986 a business and government team from the USA offered a new hybrid strain of an oilseed plant that has a high oil yield and promised "a new G.R. in oilseeds." History repeats itself.

One aspect of this program is geographical; the planners want to extend the G.R. model beyond the Punjab area. Presently the centers of oilseed production are the states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, so this is likely to be where the next round of "development" will be.

A fourth loop is Operation Flood, which was a World Bank financed project for milk. The expropriation of

people from the land in India is at the same time the expropriation of people from cows. Everyone knows that one of the principles of Hinduism is reverence for the cow. A central point in any villager's life is the cow: taking her to graze, gathering fodder, collecting the dung, shaping it into patties and letting them dry for use as fuel, milking her, and making clarified butter from the milk (*ghee*). For migrant laborers and urban workers, milk is expensive if available at all. Since the early 1970's, the State Planners have extended the G.R. model to milk. With subsidies from the World Bank and the EEC, they established a system (for Bombay and Delhi in particular) to collect milk in rural and suburban areas, process and refrigerate it in large factories, and then sell it in the cities.

The subsidy from the W.B. and the EEC was in the form of dried milk. The Indian government sold this dried milk and kept the revenue to build the indigenous milk circuit. (Dried milk tastes awful, especially after being shipped across the ocean.) The European countries (and the USA by the way) have tremendous surpluses of milk and milk products which they have been giving away. India was just one recipient. But today the EEC countries and the USA are trying to end their subsidies to dairy farmers. This subject was even a top item on the agenda of the Vienna summit of the Big Seven industrialized countries in May 1987. There were street protests of European dairy farmers in the same month.⁴⁵

A final loop of the circuit that needs to be mentioned is the suppression mechanism. Since the early 1970's the government has been rapidly increasing the numbers of policemen, paramilitary soldiers, and Army soldiers to suppress all the contradictions of the circuit outlined above. But these gunworkers have often been recruited from the ranks of the landless and the recently dispossessed (as we saw with regard to Punjabis and Biharis), so even here the government is having problems. With the rise in the number of gunworkers, there has been a corresponding rise in the number of police strikes and riots. A 1983 survey of police strikes by an American scholar observed, "the lower ranks of the police are now prepared to emulate the tactics of militant labor. They will strike and they will organize."⁴⁶

One of the reasons they have been striking is the lousy working conditions; much of their work is now concerned with attacking riots and demonstrations of workers. According to this overly empirical scholar, the incidence of riot-

ing "per unit of population" (?) has doubled from 1965 to 1977. In 1977, the government estimated that there were 76,000 riots of five or more people.

The Ecological Counterrevolution

Besides these various social struggles which have emerged and intensified because of the G.R., there are also profound ecological contradictions. First of all: desertification. The accumulation of water in certain areas by dams means the depletion of water in other areas. In this way dam irrigation directly contributes to the creation of deserts in downstream areas. Additionally, the cultivation of crops with inorganic fertilizer, pesticides and monocropping depletes the topsoil. In areas where the G.R. farming techniques have been introduced, the fertility of the land has rapidly declined. As one study put it, the "G.R. is threatening to convert even fairly good lands into desert."⁴⁷

Secondly: soil salinization. With all the underground water being pumped up by tubewells in Punjab, the soil is becoming increasingly more saline, (and thus infertile).

Thirdly: soil erosion. The overall process of deforestation (through the submerging of forest by dams, the drying up of some forest lands by desertification, the clearing of forests for farm land, and timber harvesting) leads directly to soil erosion. Ultimately, deforestation translates into further desertification. The G.R. farming techniques also contribute to erosion. Fourthly: this soil erosion loops back onto the dams. Many of the dams are rapidly silting up from the erosion and becoming inoperable sooner than the government expects.

For the Indian people, these four processes mean a deterioration in the use-value of the fundamentals of life: the land and the water. Both desertification and deforestation have led to the expropriation of people from the land. For capital, they mean a decline in the land and the water's exchange value, i.e. a decline in agricultural production. Thus, capital's planners have been trying to cope with land reclamation and afforestation projects. The World Bank has been advising and financing the Indian government for both strategies.

For example, the W.B. has been promoting eucalyptus tree cultivation for afforestation. However, this tree uses up a lot of water and provides neither fuelwood, fodder, nor shade for

The World Bank has been promoting the eucalyptus tree, which uses a lot of water and provides neither fuelwood, fodder nor shade for the villagers.

the villagers. Its appeal for the W.B. is that it grows quickly and can be used for paper and rayon production; it is an "income generating" strategy for the villagers. There is nothing like profiting from both the creation of the disease (deforestation) and the selling of the cure (afforestation). The W.B. knows that the present need is to profit from all the destruction they've been able to inflict in the past forty years: in May 1987 it announced the tripling of its environmental staff in Washington D.C.

The Indian planners' response to droughts and desertification has been weather prediction. Part of their satellite program (arranged with NASA) and part of their super-computer program (negotiated with the US government in 1986) is weather monitoring.

Shortcircuits

Now that we have gone through the circuit and come full circle, from the satellites floating overhead in the sky to the expropriated people of India floating across the countryside, we must leave the concluding statements to one of those who have been uprooted. An elderly woman, who was working on a dam in Maharashtra, explained to Gail Omvedt her view on food and the class struggle:

Plenty of grain is grown in India. But we workers buy it at high prices. We have to eat one-half or one-fourth of a bhakri [a flat bread similar to a chapati made with millet] and when we

This will help them predict agricultural production. If there is decreased rainfall they can plan for foodgrain imports to control any revolts in the cities due to increased prices of grain, and they can plan for some water delivery schemes to control any potential rebellions in the countryside due to drought. Indian brahmins used to impose their social power through their control of the weather and their monopoly on any communication with the gods. Now they impose their agricultural strategy with the help of satellites bought from Boston brahmins. Their new mantras are the binary computer languages. (Is it any coincidence that the high-tech yuppies of Boston are into the mysticism of Eastern religions?)

remember the land we used to have we can't digest that! We don't even have clothes for our body. As for food, if we get jawar [millet] then we eat jawar, if we get milo [sorghum] we eat milo, if we get vegetables we eat them, if not then chilis. We have to eat dry bhakri. There is no milk. Where would we get milk? We have to drink jag-gery [brown sugar] tea without milk. If grain is available we eat, if not we drink water and go to sleep.

The woman said she was ready to go raid a rich merchant's house and "pull and drag a big sack of grain" even though she was old. Then she said:

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20. Omvedt 1987:33.
21. *India Today*, "From Guns to Tractors," August 15, 1986. See also *Socio-Economic Development of a Dacoit-Affected Area in Chambal Valley* (New Delhi, 1976).
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25. P. Singh, *Emerging Patterns in Punjab Economy* (Sterling: New Delhi, 1985:32).
26. *Indian Agriculture in Brief* (Govt. of India: New Delhi, 1985:353-4).
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28. H.K. Puri, "Green Revolution' and its Impact on Punjab Politics," *Indian Political Science Review*, January 1983:108.
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31. P. Singh, "Two Facets of Religious Revivalism," *Shackles and Women*, May-August 1986:28. Singh notes the existence of "communal" and "fanatic" factions within Sikh movement, but suggests they are in the minority.
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40. D.S. Sindhu, *Price Policy for Wheat in India* (S. Chand & Co: New Delhi, 1979:71).
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42. D. Hofstadter, *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (Vintage: New York 1979:10).
43. One of the only analyses to appear in the US on the Sikh massacres was Amrita & Kesselman, "Class, Communalism, and Official Complicity: India After Indira," *Monthly Review*, January 1985. The analysis is incomplete and flawed but nonetheless edifying.
44. The best analysis of the massacres in Delhi is I. Mohan, "Resettlement: The Other Delhi," *Lokayan Bulletin: Voices From a Scarred City*, V.3, N.1.
45. After 17 years of Operation Flood, the indigenous milk circuit is still inchoate. Indian planners are now relying on greater quantities of EEC dried milk than ever before. They are extremely worried since it is clear that the EEC will soon stop providing it gratis.
46. D. Bayley, "The Police and Political Order in India," *Asian Survey*, April 1983.
47. "Drought, Desertification, and Famine—A Report of a Dialogue," *Lokayan Bulletin*, V.4, N.3-4.
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CLIPPED COINS, ABUSED WORDS, & CIVIL GOVERNMENT

John Locke's Philosophy of Money

C. G. Caffentzis

Starting from an actual historical dispute involving the "clipping" of silver currency by money "pirates" in 17th-century England, Caffentzis's "ampliative" method opens out into an exceedingly original and provocative critique of John Locke's economic beliefs, his semantic theories and his philosophy of the state. Virtually all of the standard critical work on Locke is "undone" in Caffentzis's treatment, which is also of immediate consequence for the leading monetary theories of the present day. This is the first volume in a trilogy on the philosophies of money of the major British empiricists, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.



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Correspondence

Dear Friends,

You were making jokes about my "search for paradise" when I told you that I was going to the South Seas. I assured you I was only looking for a nice, warm, quiet spot to relax a bit.

When we arrived at Faaa airport in Tahiti, everything seemed alright. Barefooted men and women in colorful pareos and with flower wreaths on their heads, singing those embarrassingly kitschy songs. Immigration was quick. But when we asked for hotels, we were informed that the city was on fire, the streets blocked, the cheap hotels in the downtown area evacuated. "Ils sont fous," (they're crazy) everybody told us. The air smelled of smoke. The taxi-driver was nervous. "I hope they're not coming to our place. . ." he said.

Next day we got the whole story. The dockers had been on strike. They asked for 7 more men to be hired, 29 instead of 22. The dockers had occupied the quais. Police—intervention. Rocks thrown at them. Tear gas. The dockers crossed the bridge, came to the downtown area. They were joined by "hooligans," irresponsible elements of all sorts. Cars are burnt. Houses set on fire. "A strike turns into social revolt," as the local newspaper (*La Depeche*) puts it. La Legion Etrangere comes in. More fires, more shops attacked.

Isn't it funny? The headlines in the papers were almost identical to those we had in Zurich in 1980 when another "earthly paradise" lost its innocence. Then it was bad for the banking business, now tourism is in danger. (And my nice

quiet holiday.)

From the point of view of social mechanism, the riots are pretty clear: it's a B-C combination. A very young and small working class combined with "unguaranteed workers," each contributing its typical way of struggle (disproduction and disruption).

Explanations are easy. The Left from Paris is sympathetic to those "who have been excluded from development." In the same issue, former French Prime Minister Fabius (a socialist) insists on the necessity of nuclear tests in Mururoa (where the Legionnaires were flown in from). Tahiti is an apartheid society. The very few rich (tourists or people in the tourist business) lead a metropolitan lifestyle, have villas, yachts, cars, etc. Around them the natives get a few jobs, sit around without any purpose, with no access to anything except coconuts, sunbaths, etc. Life is expensive: a beer (in the store) costs \$1.50. Retreat to any kind of traditional lifestyle is impossible: land has been used for hotel resorts, knowledge is lost, the sea polluted, families destroyed. It's no fun sitting in a hut while cars race by and fat tourists peep in.

Development is as mad as the return to a "primitive lifestyle." So the status quo will need its guardian angels for quite a while. The Pacific isn't any more what it used to be. On Fiji, Colonel Rabuka tries to defend the rights of the native population with fascist methods. And puritan bigotry: he banned lawn-mowing on Sundays. (Had he banned

lawns, he at least would have been an ecological hero.) Cuban, Libyan, and East German agents are lurking in the background, of course. So the "future" might hold as a "solution" some kind of christian-fundamentalist-military dictatorships, using "traditional lifestyle" as an ideological cover. The "bad influence of tourists" can be a pretext of shutting off people from any influences. . .

So, dear friends, no paradise is in sight. Just more struggles, more repression, more madness. What do the "hooligans" want? Independence, more jobs, more money, access to development. Sitting in the palace, not in the hut or destroying both. The dockers got their demands met, actually. But they are very few and "privileged" because they've got a job (they're even paid when there is no work).

Somehow there seems to be no way out. Struggles turn into development, development into crisis, crisis into struggles. A not so merry-go-round.

Yet there must be a vision of another type of life, relaxed for sure, but also open, world-wide, based not so much on work (and the work it presupposes) but on "savoir vivre" (sounds colonialist in Tahiti), on a new type of subsistence that's not just misery. Strangely, it's too hot and humid here to think about these things. The "way out" is not a geographical problem—that's sure.

Now let's check out the next island.

Yours,

(The author of "Fire and Ice: Space Wars in Zurich," in *Midnight Notes* #4, *Space Notes*)



In praise of conspiracy theory

Con-spiring
etymologically breathing together.
Thus question number one:
Don't our masters share
the same sighs
at our all too poor performance?
And don't they in the same oval rooms
plan and plot
how to squeeze
that last drop of blood
and devise appropriate punishment
should the carrot dangled in front of us
fail to convince us that
god himself designed
their productivity charts?

Conspiracy, dreadful word
full of ominous reverberations;
glimpses of closed doors
silently dispatched orders
evil intents.
Impossible, you say,
don't let that right wing propaganda
con you.
That bullet that goes right
through your head
was planned for you and me
since the beginning of
capital's time.
And that payout,
so deep it went through
our pockets
tearing our pants apart,
is all in the logic of the system.
So beware of the
conspiracy theory of history.
No suspicion is fit for us,
brothers and sisters,
no stretching of the eyes
to read between the lines
or to follow a trail of blood
beneath our masters' footsteps.
We talk stocks, bonds and profits.
The price of gold goes down?
There is shooting in South Africa.
Interest rates go up?
We starve in Nigeria.
What you see is what you get
and they tell us so.

But I know that stocks carry no guns
and paper bonds can't decide
that price tag on a can of milk
that will cause children to starve
in the shantytowns of the empire.
And no company chart sends
hands dripping with blood
to hunt at night
the alleys of El Salvador
for that wound in the flesh
that will square their profits.

Between the stocks and the unemployment line
the bonds and the torture chambers
fall the consultations
of scores of men,
some ferociously bold
others cringing in the daylight
like worms under a lifted brick.
Restless pilgrims
in bullet-proof limousines
they congregate to
the Meccas of their murders,
New York, London, Geneva,
where decisions are made
that will spread ripples of fear
in the four corners
of capital's world.

No conspiracy, you say?
By what linguistic invention
should I name the act and moment
when crushing cigarette butts
some men convene on that 100% increase
that will take food off our tables
and keep us turning in bed at night
endlessly calculating
our chance to survive.

Come, then,
let us sing praises
to the conspiracy theory of history.
For as long as there are men
who sit and plan deeds
that cause any of us to die,
no conceptual flight
or verbal trick
will stop me from concluding
they are conspiring against us.

*Silvia
Port Harcourt, 1985*

